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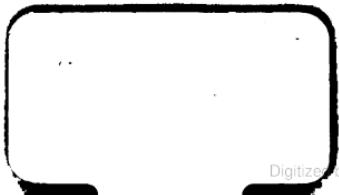
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# *An Angel in a Web*

Julian Ralph

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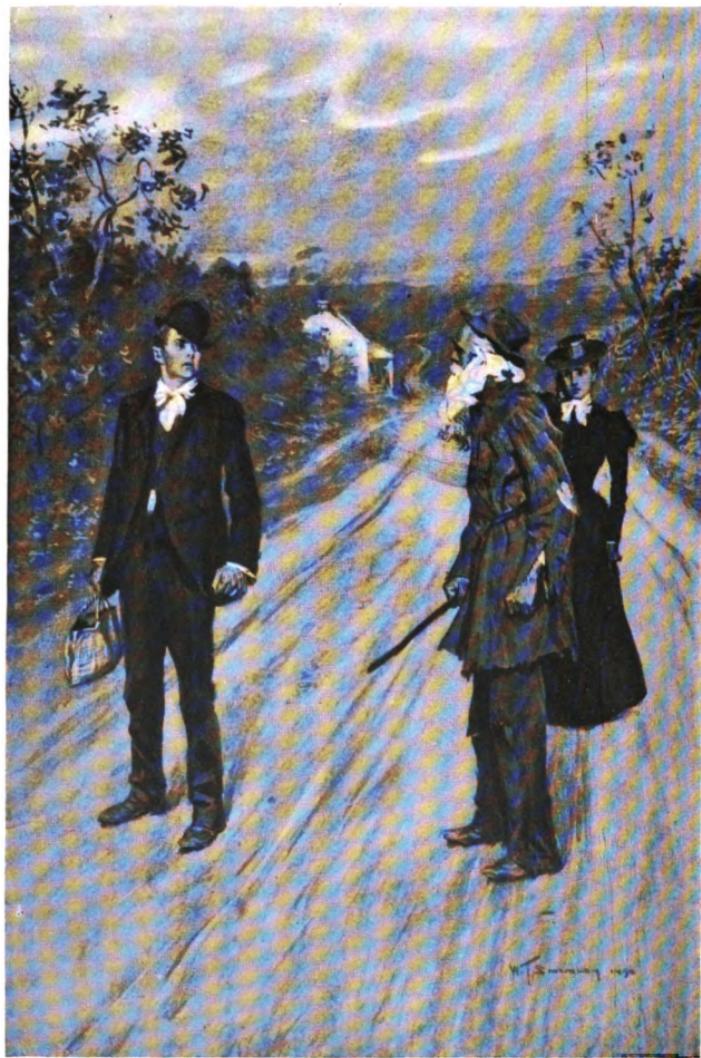




*R. H. Hawthorne.*







[Page 46]

**“ ‘AH! WHO CARES FOR YOU?’ SAID HEINTZ”**

# AN ANGEL IN A WEB

*By*  
**JULIAN RALPH**

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY*  
**W. T. SMEDLEY**



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**In Affectionate Memory of**

**MY FATHER**

**JOSEPH EDWARD RALPH, M.D.**



## CONTENTS

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CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE COMPANY AT THE CLOCK HOUSE . . . . .	1
II. A PEARL OUT OF SETTING . . . . .	18
III. FROM BAD HANDS TO WORSE . . . . .	31
IV. AGAIN WITH THE ETHERIANS . . . . .	47
V. 'TWIXT NIGHT AND MORNING . . . . .	66
VI. LAURA AT THE CLOCK HOUSE . . . . .	82
VII. UNDER HIDEOUS SUSPICION . . . . .	90
VIII. A FRIEND HELPS TO SPIN THE WEB . . . . .	102
IX. BOTH SIDES OF A GRAVE . . . . .	117
X. LAMONT'S INDUSTRIOUS VILLANY . . . . .	133
XI. A VIOLENT COURTSHIP . . . . .	143
XII. THROUGH A BREAK IN THE WEB . . . . .	162
XIII. LAURA HEARS ILL OF HERSELF . . . . .	181
XIV. LAURA SEES EDITHA . . . . .	202
XV. THE WEB DESTROYED . . . . .	218



## ILLUSTRATIONS

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“ ‘AH! WHO CARES FOR YOU?’ SAID HEINTZ” . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
“ ‘BUT, HULLO! HERE SHE COMES NOW’” . . . . .	<i>Facing p. 38</i>
“ ‘I’M A BAD EGG, I AM’” . . . . .	“ 42
“ ‘IF YOU REMAIN, YOU MAY GET A TERM IN PRISON’” . . . . .	“ 94
“ ‘HE SPOKE IN BROKEN SENTENCES’” . . . . .	“ 114
“ ‘THEY DO BE ALL DOWN THAT WAY, MUM’” . . . . .	“ 144
“ ‘I WARN YOU—NEVER TOUCH ME!’” . . . . .	“ 158
“ ‘YOU POOR, DEAR CHILD!’ SHE CRIED” . . . . .	“ 200
“ ‘I WARN YOU I’LL SING SOMETHIN’ REAL B-A-A-D’” . . . . .	“ 210
“ ‘CAN’T HAVE IT, MADAM,’ HE SHOUTED” . . . . .	“ 222
“ ‘SURE, YE FAINTED, MA’AM,’ SAID IRISH ANNIE” . . . . .	“ 236



# AN ANGEL IN A WEB

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## CHAPTER I

### THE COMPANY AT THE CLOCK HOUSE

On the stone posts of the entrance to the largest estate near Powellton, a few miles to the northeast of Fishkill-on-the-Hudson, is the painted word "Belview," but the people of the neighborhood call the place the "Clock House." This is because of the great clock, with perhaps the only plain plate-glass dial in our country, which almost grotesquely fills the face of the short, thick tower in the front of the square Colonial mansion. As seen from other hills and risings—from Powellton, and from nearly as far as Fishkill—this big disk, always illuminated at night, hangs in the lower air like such a moon as only the Japanese have the courage to paint. Except from a distance, or from the high seat of a hotel stage, nothing of the Clock House is to be seen, because the park which frames

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

it around is enclosed by a tall brick wall built upon an embankment. From a stage-driver's seat, or when one stands before the superb gate of ornamental iron-work which breaks the wall at one end, one may see a part of the Lamont place. The view would bewitch the senses were not even more beautiful public views so common throughout that grander park which we call the Valley of the Hudson.

The place was built by the present owner's great-grandfather, who, though a Scotchman, early embraced the American cause, performed a long and honorable service as judge of the Court of Common Pleas, and retired from that post on the very day of the death of his friend General Washington. It was at first the finest country-house in Dutchess County, and to-day it has lost nothing by standing, unimpaired, as a noble example of the dignified and hospitable fashion of our forebears. The long, graceful reaches of a double wave of well-trimmed grass are broken by a drive-way, flung down like a loop of yellow ribbon by the mansion which caps the soft, bosomlike crest of the first grassy wave, and, on either side of the house, by a grove of oaks which act as screens, and were planted to serve as such. They are intended to prevent all possible visual intrusion upon the

## AT THE CLOCK HOUSE

sports, the siestas, and possibly the courtships, which chime with such a place; in a word, to accompany a sort of English idea of privacy, which was that of the original Lamont, founder of the American family. This came with his blood as it stirred first across the Atlantic. There privacy is held to be the first essential of home comfort, if not of existence, and even the last of the Lamonts clung to this tradition.

It was after midnight of a day in the early spring of 189-, while the real moon and the brightly lighted windows of the house dimmed the diluted effulgence of the huge clock-face, that two laborers, belated on their way to Powellton, stopped to stare through the gate and to listen.

“I can’d hear noding,” said one, after a moment of silence.

“I don’d, neider,” the other replied; “vind’s der wrong vay, or maype der glock’s shtopt already.”

“Vould dot mean—”

“Dot ’d mean dot der olt Kurnel’s det,” said the other. “Dwice I’fe seen der houze lighted up, all aplaze, like it is now. Firsht dime vos for a grant pall vhen dey camed home—der Kurnel und his pride. She vos a angel vot neffer vos meant for no such vorld as dis. Und der second dime vos only a year afterwards, vhen she dite in shild-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

bed. I vos a young feller dot dime, und came mit a lot of oder young chaps sbpecially to hear der glock dicking, shlow und shlower und shlower, as it always does when det comes by dot houze. I dit hear it, too—derrible slow it dicked ; und den I didn't hear it no more, begause it shtopped. She hat dite while I vos listening.”

“I hear it now,” said he who had been the first to speak, a youth of twenty-two.

“Do yer? I ton’t,” said the other, who had passed sixty. “My hearing ain’t vot I used to got.”

“Und it ain’t so shlow, neider,” said the first speaker.

“It’s got to be shlow,” said the other, positively. “Didn’t I tell yer der Kurnel’s dying? Vell, den, it has to be shlow; it alvays got to been derrible shlow at such a dime.”

They passed on up the road and were gone, but the subject was taken up within the house. Tappin, the butler, hustled in his quick, nervous, somewhat pompous way into the dining-room on the ground-flour to fetch the decanter of cognac to his dying master’s bedside, and never suspected that his father stood, in the posture of a servitor, behind the empty chair at the table’s head, and before the figures of Hamilton Lamont, his wife

## AT THE CLOCK HOUSE

Deborah, Archibald Paton and his wife Flora, Isabel Lamont, the dying Colonel's mother, and several other relatives and connections long since rubbed off the slate of earthly reckoning. Nor did he know—how could he?—that only a minute before this, in bending over the Colonel to catch his whispered “milk and brandy, Tappin,” he had pressed his substantial body literally through and around another Etherian, Editha, once the child-wife of the dying man.

His errand to the dining-room did not disturb the Lamonts of the past. They continued their conversation while he was by, but they did so in their own fashion, which could not jar the completest silence. They thought, instead of speaking; they knew what was thought, instead of hearing it; indeed, though they saw far better than we, it was by an extended comprehension that they did so. Each Etherian took the guise of a formless cloud of faintest light—a puff of luminous vapor around a spark a trifle brighter than the rest, yet not bright enough to be distinguished by mortal vision. Thus most of them appeared to each other. I say “most of them,” because it was different with those who had known each other intimately as men and women, or as spirits among men. They saw each other somewhat as

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

they had appeared on earth. So strong is our imaginative faculty that it resists death, and in an assembly of old friends like this the Etherians recall each other's physical personalities. It is immaterial whether they really saw their old selves in this earthly way. They believed they did. But it was a faint and nebulous view, as unsubstantial as recollected vision would render it.

These at the Clock House saw Editha as she had been fond of dressing herself just before her last illness, in a robe of blue cloth, flaring open above the waist, to show a loose under-dress of thinnest lawn, which left her beautiful neck as bare as her plump oval face in its framing of black hair. And those she had known among men she, too, saw as they had been wont to dress. The other Etherians were mere rays to her vision—though they were as readable to her as books. She was obliged to imagine the human aspect of the elder Mrs. Lamont, who died before she had been born. She thought of her as being like the old lady's well-remembered portrait in the dining-room. And that was how Mrs. Lamont seemed to those who had known her in womanhood—with her kindly, motherly, wise face above a quaint evening gown of the first year of this century. The others were all commonplace, latter-day figures.

## AT THE CLOCK HOUSE

Editha's happy presence made itself felt in the dining-room soon after the fleshly Tappin had taken away the object of his errand.

"We knew you had come, dear," said the elder Mrs. Lamont. "We have all been thinking of you."

"Thank you, mother; I am very glad to see you all," said Editha. "You were talking about the clock. Is its beat very slow?"

"Not very," said Hamilton Lamont. "It is lengthening the intervals between the ticks, but his release is not to be immediate." After a pause he added, addressing his mother: "But you and Editha have been here some hours. The rest of us have just come, and are preparing for the disclosures that are to be made to us. Give us time to learn what is happening. I only know that the Colonel is passing from earth to us. He appeared to us with the summons to come and exert ourselves in our various interests, and that is all that any of us know."

"I beg pardon of all of you," said Mrs. Lamont. "The truth is that I have been called so often that I can instantly put myself in the receptive state. I learned everything before I reached here. But do not let me delay you. Things are happening that are of the greatest moment, the keenest interest, to most of you."

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

Eagerly the new arrivals prepared to comprehend the family crisis. The diaphanous clouds of light that had clustered before the great carved marble fireplace scattered, each going to a place by itself. After a few moments each began to receive an account of what had befallen the family. The disclosures came with what to us would have been bewildering rapidity, until all learned the truth, regardless of their prejudices and predilections. They absorbed the intelligence much as we read the news flashed upon stereopticon screens in our streets at election times. Each event took the form of a reproduction of an actual occurrence in the life of an earthly Lamont. The revelations began with the family affairs at the last moment, receding to whatever point led each visitant to the situation as he last knew it. Each scene came like a flash of light, and the words spoken by the living Lamonts—yes, even the thoughts which prompted speech or silence in each tableau—were made known to these disembodied intelligences. With a great extension of our faculties, even we could have seen these tableaux flashing like pulsations of light before each vapor-like form.

Presently all came together again to discuss their readings of the future, for, given the premises in any case, Etherians at once divine the fut-

## AT THE CLOCK HOUSE

ure, more or less clearly according to their differing powers, as we shall see.

“How the clock will race when the old wretch is once out of the house!” said Hamilton’s wife, Deborah.

“My Alex?” exclaimed the old Colonel’s mother, in surprise.

“Oh, Deborah, you forget that I am here!” said Editha, softly. “Surely you saw him as he has been since I came to his bedside. I threw the influence of my love around him, and such a kindly smile set itself on his dear face, so calm did his sleep become, and so gentle were his dreams—oh, you could not speak as you do of him if you really knew him.”

“He was always gentle enough towards you,” Hamilton said; “but, come, now; he’s been a bear to every one else, you must admit.”

“Aunt Isabel,” said Mrs. Paton, “you see clearly. Who is this new claimant to the estate?”

“It is a woman, and her path is crossed as if by chasms,” Mrs. Deborah remarked.

“Do not attempt to deceive, Deborah,” the Colonel’s mother said. “We see your hand in the making of the pitfalls in the girl’s way. Take care you do not go too far in your ill-judged kindness to your son Jack. The friendships that this

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

innocent child will develop among us here will be too powerful for your plans."

"But why do we not know her? She does not connect herself with any scene in this house."

"She is my daughter's child," said Mrs. Lamont, "but you do not know her because her parents were separated from the family in anger years ago, and are both on earth. It is for those of us who love justice to see that she is made the heir, and to see also" (here she gave a swift glance at Deborah Lamont) "that the plots of those who would couple this fortune with evil are brought to nothing."

"I am not able to see far as yet," said Editha, despairingly, "though I can read the present perfectly. My husband thinks he has no heir except Hamilton's son, Jack—or Archibald, the son of our cousins, the Patons, here. Though you are his brother, Hamilton, and your son would naturally be the heir, the mere mention of Jack's name angers the Colonel. He says he would squander the property; therefore he turned to Archibald today, and was met by an unexpected obstacle."

"Why not say he has disowned Jack? I know it," said Mrs. Deborah. "Oh! what an outrage it is! You are all against my son. Talk of justice! Why, the property is his by right."

## AT THE CLOCK HOUSE

“I think the only justice is what is happening,” said her husband. “If I could, I would not exert my influence to have Jack made the heir. Better far that the property should go to the State than that the honored old house should become the rendezvous of courtesans and blacklegs, and the scene of his orgies. I gave up all hope for him before my responsibilities ceased.”

“When did yours cease?” his wife asked, warmly. “I am his mother yet. He was always led to expect his uncle’s fortune when ours should be exhausted. He has pursued pleasure, but only as thousands do who are similarly placed. He is not in the way of any of you. Why are you all bent on wrecking his future?”

“He owes the wrecking of his life to you, Deborah,” said the elder Mrs. Lamont. “You indulged him in everything. You always condoned his faults; you even encouraged him in his idle, mischievous course.”

“Young Archie’s refusal to accept my husband’s offer,” said Editha, “so excited the Colonel that I had difficulty in calming him. When he told Archibald to-day that he would make him his heir on condition that he changed his name to Lamont, Archie not only refused to accept the condition, but spoke rudely, and—well, the Colonel’s

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

indignation was natural. Archibald said that he had not only made his own name famous by his writings, but that it would be an act of dishonor to his father's memory to change it."

"The fact is, as we all know," said Mrs. Deborah, in her most combative tone, "that the Colonel used the most insulting language about Archibald's family, saying that it was common and vulgar. He told Archibald that his father had been dependent on his, the Colonel's, assistance, to lift him out of financial troubles and keep his head above water. He said that his father died in his debt, though he might have paid him had he not been too self-indulgent. Archibald was furious at the old badger, and I admire him for it."

"Archie's a good boy," said his father. "I am proud of him."

"He is far too quixotic," exclaimed Mrs. Paton. "I hope he has not gone too far to retreat. I seem to see him in the will at the end of this confusion."

"Archibald is happy with his work and his friends in New York," interposed Deborah. "He is too true a man to stoop to rob my boy of his rightful heritage."

"Your son will not inherit the property, Deborah, no matter what you do," said Mrs. Lamont.

## AT THE CLOCK HOUSE

“Take my advice ; employ your influence to save him from worse misfortunes to come.”

She rose to forbid a reply, and went with Editha to the side of the bed where the Colonel lay, making a feeble fight for the life he had spent in pampering an imperious independence and pride. His wrinkled face, the color of old leather, and crowned by a tousled mass of snowy hair, looked like an eagle's, so beaklike was his great curved nose in proportion to his shrivelled face. His had been a troubled sleep, but instantly on the arrival of the only two beings who had ever loved him he grew more calm. Meantime his faithful old servant Tappin, who rarely left his bedside, betook himself to his own room, and flung himself in all his clothes upon his bed, where the spirit of his father sought his company. Young Archibald Paton sat, wide awake, in his bedroom. He was a tall and handsome man of thirty years, thin of frame, with a pale, nervous face, the strength of which was in his high brow and kindling eyes. His face was American, but the unmistakably French cut of his pointed beard gave him a Parisian air. The rings and the charms which rattled on his watch-chain were other relics of the years he had spent abroad. His father and mother found him calmly reading a novel by the light of his bedroom candle,

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

though the day had been the stormiest of his life, and he was determined to leave the house next day, putting it behind him as he had already done with the offer of all its owner's wealth.

Mrs. Deborah sought her son and found him in Powellton, at cards, in the hotel. She stood close beside him as he drew towards him the small silver coins he had won with his last hand of cards.

"Come," she said, by a focusing of her thought upon his mind.

He leaned back in his chair, hesitating a moment in that position. Then he rose, and leaving the coins where they were, said: "I won't play any more. I feel peculiar—that is, I can't keep my mind on the game. Buy my share of the drinks with that money. I am going to get a breath of air." Then he passed out with his mother, and walked to a carriage-block by the road, and sat down. He imagined that he gave himself up to thought about his affairs; in reality he was engaged in a struggle to comprehend the counsel his mother poured out upon him.

Beside the Colonel's bed the old man's mother turned to her daughter-in-law.

"I cannot think why you are here," she said.

"Why I am here?" Editha repeated. "Where

## AT THE CLOCK HOUSE

should I be but beside my husband at this time of change?"

"You can serve him best by going to Laura Balm. Do you not feel her need of you?"

"Feel it? How do you mean? I feel something—fluttering at my intelligence—tugging at it, as if to pull me somewhere—but it is not clear."

"It is my granddaughter, Laura," Mrs. Lamont said. "My daughter's child, of whom the others spoke as the heir. Don't you remember that the Colonel quarrelled with a younger sister over a love-match that he forbade? It was with a man of doubtful character; you must have known of it."

"I didn't know there was a child by that marriage. But if I am needed, let me try my utmost instantly," the sympathetic Editha replied. "Where shall I find my niece?"

"Laura is a sweet girl," Mrs. Lamont replied, "and you are called to her because you and she are in the completest affinity. You will be thwarted somewhat, but don't ask how, or allow yourself to be discouraged, for even while you fancy yourself helpless you will comfort and encourage her amid serious difficulties and alarms."

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“What am I to do?”

“You will find that she does not know of us. She has lived in the completest innocence, and, so far as the world is concerned, ignorance. She must be made acquainted with and brought to the good fortune that awaits her, but many mishaps and counterplots will have to be overcome. Go at once. Concentrate your mind on hers. As soon as possible dominate her so that you can counsel her. The power is in you. Exercise it. It is we who rule the affairs of men and women in their greatest crises. They call what we do by such names as impulse, conscience, foresight, judgment—a hundred fumbling, foggy words; but all this you will understand quickly. Now go. Will yourself at Lingard’s Mill, beyond Fishkill. Just after you leave Fishkill, on the right of the main road is a lane leading to the north. She is in the first house—the only house near the main road. I see you have no time to lose. She is in trouble and under bad influence; but it is weak, like all evil influence. Go. I will care for my son.”

“Ought I to leave him? Can you soothe him as I could?”

“Go, child. I can control my son, while you cannot. My part is to make him realize that there

## AT THE CLOCK HOUSE

is a Laura Balm. He does not know it. We will bring them together if he lives long enough. As for soothing him, the world says that a mother's is the only love that is unselfish; certainly yours cannot be more tender."



## CHAPTER II

### A PEARL OUT OF SETTING

WHEN Editha's spirit reached the house in which she was to find Laura Balm, she was surprised to discover it a laborer's tenement—a tiny, aged brick cabin, with an undulating roof green with moss. It consortied so well with its pastoral surroundings that we Americans would carry off a camera's reflection of it were it in some other country than our own, because of its picturesqueness and Old-Worldishness, but nowhere could we consider it a suitable shelter for a gentle girl. It was all the more picturesque, perhaps, because it was in need of repair, and because the yard around it was in a state of disorder. Editha hovered before the place for a moment, shocked at finding it so different from what should be the abode of an heir to the Lamont wealth. Indoors, matters were worse. The disorder had all the ear-marks of a slattern's house-keeping. Even the débris of the last meal—at which a whiskey-bottle had figured conspicuously—still littered the table.

## A PEARL OUT OF SETTING

But up-stairs in a sweet-aired, tidy room, upon a snowy bed, amid the pretty-pretties with which a girl of refined taste would surround herself, lay a beautiful maiden fast asleep. Her sunlit hair, caught up in a knot at the back, hung loosely on either side of her finely cut face. Grief and trouble were enthroned behind that face, yet these were too newly come to have left a trace there. Its shape was slender oval, its type was spiritual and dainty, yet the lips were full and eloquent of kindliness, humor, and the qualities that accompany robust health. Editha could see the girl's eyes through their closed lids, and knew that they were large, and of as light a blue as the sky when the sun is highest. It was a good and lovable face that appeared there above a ruffle of snowy lace, and it impelled Editha to kiss her—if an Etherian touch to the girl's cheek may be so called—with many of those soft kisses which pray God most of us have been and are often to be blessed with, yet that we can never be certain we have enjoyed, because they are as gentle as the glances of angels, as soft as the breathings of flowers, and as noiseless to our ears as the music of the sun's rays that sing their way through space.

“Laura! dear Laura! I am come to you,” the spirit said, in a thought-whisper; “a loving friend

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

is with you. Tell me, sweet child, what is troubling you. How can I help you?"

The golden-framed cameo face upon the pillow moved with gentle restlessness, a slender arm, like ivory tinted with the sap of rose petals, was pulled from under the bed-covering and thrown down upon it. The corners of the budding lips drew downward in an expression of sadness and perplexity. A sigh which only keen hearing could catch escaped from the sleeper. Laura was telling the child-wife her troubles—at least, she was recalling to herself the state of her mind, and fancying some one in dreamland had sympathized with her.

The kindly Etherian drew back and fixed her gaze with intensity upon the dreaming girl.

"No, no," she cried, "my powers are not yet strong. What does she say? Her father away—does not know where; mother ill—shrieking—carried from this house? Can she mean that her mother is mad? She is alone, friendless, penniless—she certainly is thinking that to me. But I get only fragments, and cannot connect them. I must understand her. Dear Laura, try again to tell me everything."

Were we to content ourselves with such slow and patient processes as Editha commanded in

## A PEARL OUT OF SETTING

order to absorb what information she got from Laura Balm, this story would lag unconscionably, and it would be disappointingly incomplete as well. Let us arrive at the same goal quicker and better by our own methods.

It was more than twenty years, then, since Laura's mother made her choice between the guardianship of her brother the Colonel, at the Clock House, and that of Jerrold Balm, the lover whose aimless life had led the Colonel to refuse him even the standing of a visitor at the Clock House. Her choice made, Laura's mother saw the Colonel's door closed behind her forever. She married, and went to live in Europe, bravely determining to make the best of a match which even she mistrusted. The ill-mated couple were never happy after the bloom, the novelty, of their new relationship had gone. Balm had scarcely a trace of her strongest qualities—pride and ambition. She was refined in her tastes and pure of soul, while he was coarse in his and without sufficient principle to ballast a well-ordered or even a reputable career. They quarrelled. He violated his vows of fidelity. She scolded and cried, and in the end he left her and her baby daughter, sending them afterwards that portion of his income which is usually left after the exactions of a mis-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

tress have been met—barely enough to keep up a partnership between body and soul.

Hearing that an old servant had become a widow and was living alone at the tiny cluster of cottages called Lingard's Mill, Mrs. Balm came as a boarder to the house in which we have found her daughter. She never made her return to America known to her brother. Her pride was unbendable. The servant died, and in his turn her husband married and died, and the poor home of the Balms was thus quickly left in charge of this second widow. Mrs. Balm escaped from a terrible illness with the loss of her mind, and had been taken to an asylum only a week before Editha's visit, leaving Laura alone with a woman of what is called in the South "poor white" stock, a vira-go at best, and at the worst a frequent victim of drink.

Laura's little world was thus shattered at a blow. For her world had consisted of nothing more than her mother and the books out of which Mrs. Balm drew an education for her. The changing women of the cottage touched upon her life only as they waited upon her as servants. Now, for a week, she had been alone. And on this day when Editha had come to her she had been made to see not merely that she was alone, but that she was help-

## A PEARL OUT OF SETTING

less and friendless. And this she learned through even harder faring than necessarily falls to those who are in such a desperate strait.

“ You ! You ! up there ! Yes, I mean you ; come down here at once.”

Thus her landlady, Mrs. Turley, screamed up to her from the stair-bottom early in the afternoon preceding Editha’s visit. She had never before addressed Laura in such a manner, or shown her the slightest lack of respect.

The young lady came down in such a state of surprise that she might have been likened to a person moving through a dense fog. It was when she reached the one common room of the house—the kitchen, sitting and dining room—that she saw that Mrs. Turley had been at some of the neighbors’ drinking, and had brought back with her a companion called Bill Heintz, a hulking loafer who had never done a stroke of work within the recollection of any one, and whose frequent, long-drawn-out disappearances from the village saloon were the only contributions to the neighborhood welfare he had ever made.

“ You hain’t set out nothing to eat for me and any friend I might bring home,” said Mrs. Turley. “ I’ll bet you’ve taken good care to snatch a bite for yourself, but if I find you’ve teched that

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

corn-beef I left in the cupboard, I'll make you sorry for it!"

"I have eaten nothing since breakfast," said Laura. "I have been waiting for you to—"

"Oh, you was, was you?" said the virago, with bitter insolence and contempt in her voice. "You was waitin' fer me to bile coffee fer you and put out the preserves and dance behind your chair. I know'd it. I could have told you that, Bill. Well, those days is gone, I kin tell yer; and still differenter days 'll be coming, unless you pay me for the board that's been due since a week before your mother was took, yellin' and kickin', to the 'sylum. Unless you pay me this here minute, you'll wait on me—d'ye see? Don't stand there, you lazy lummix. Go to your room and get me my money, I tell yer."

Laura looked calmly at the woman, without reproof or surprise in the gleam of her clear blue eyes.

"You must not speak to me like that," she said. "You forget yourself."

"She hain't used to no sich talk," said Heintz.

"You shet up," said the drunken woman. "What's the matter with you a-mindin' your own business? I forget myself—do I, miss? Well, then, it's because I can't see much difference be-

## A PEARL OUT OF SETTING

tween us, 'cept you're a pauper and I hain't. Do you think you kin stand me off without my rights with your high and mighty airs? You hain't got no money. They told you at the post-office they'd have to git your mother's hand to the receipt fer the letter what's there fer her, or they was 'bliged to keep it. Oh, I've been there and found every-thing out! So, Bill Heintz, she'll never have a red cent. Well, then, what are yer going to do about it? You don't know? Hain't troubled yer-self to think, have yer? Well, I have, then. I'll have no beggars playing they're ladies round me 'f I know it. I'll give you till Tuesday to pay what yer owe, and if you don't, out you go, and I'll sell yer things over yer head. Where's yer relations I've heard so much whispering about? My man that's gone heard 't you belonged to a lot of rich folks. Fetch 'em along if you've got 'em—that is, if they'll reckernize yer, an' if you ever had a father, which I doubt. If you can't do that, go and earn your living."

"How kin she earn a living?" Heintz asked, while the young lady stood before them, pale and mute as a marble statue.

"You shut up, Bill," said the drunken scold. "How kin she? Well, if she won't go out to service, there's another way she'll quickly

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

come to, in Newburg or some o' them big towns."

"I'll go to my room now," said Laura, gently.

She turned to go; but it did not suit the drunken humor of the older woman to end the matter there. She gripped the girl with a strong hand and bade her set the table and prepare the coffee, while she, "her betters," as she called herself, enjoyed a bite.

"Mrs. Turley," said the girl, firmly, "you have been drinking. I am sorry to have seen you like this."

"Drinking? Do you dare to fling it in my face that I've had to take a glass to cheer me—I, who found myself saddled with a lazy thing like you?"

"This must stop," said Laura. "Take away your hand, and do not ever speak to me like that again. I will not permit it!"

"Will yer permit this, then?" the woman asked, and dealt the girl a blow on the head which threw her heavily upon the floor.

As Heintz saw the cruel blow levelled at the gentle girl he sprang to her rescue. He was too late, yet found time to grapple with the furious woman and prevent a continuance of the assault. She fought Heintz like a man, pommelling him, while her arms were flung about like flails.

## A PEARL OUT OF SETTING

Finally he caught her arms and twisted them until she came to her knees upon the floor and cried for mercy, promising to leave the girl alone. While the disgusting tumult raged, Laura slipped out of the door.

At half a mile's distance from the house she gave vent to her feelings, and cried until her tears were spent. Then, with swollen eyelids and her thoughts still in wild confusion, she continued her walk. She had been most unfortunate all her life, but as she could not know that, it seemed to her that ill fortune had just begun to come, and with a violence past all parallel. She realized that she must leave the only shelter she knew in all the world, but she was as ignorant of what lay before her as a tropical fawn that escapes from a menagerie in the North in midwinter.

As she walked, Jack Lamont drove by and noticed her. Her dress and carriage suggested that she was a lady. Her face, though swollen by crying, strengthened the suggestion. To meet a lady, hatless, in tears, on a lonely road, piqued his curiosity.

"I beg pardon," said he, reining up. "You are in trouble. Can I help you in any way?"

"Thank you, sir; I don't need assistance," she replied, stiffly, from instinct.

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“A friend in need—you know the rest. And I am willing to be yours,” Lamont persisted.

“I don’t need any assistance, thank you,” said she.

Feeling rebuked, but vowing to himself to keep this pretty girl in mind for possible future sport, he drove on. And thus the two persons for whom the fates were mixing a witches’ broth met in ignorance of their relationship, and parted unenlightened.

Darkness soon fell, and Laura Balm crept to her chamber, there to indulge her hopes in the face of an uncertain future which she knew must begin with the morrow. Of only this was she certain—that she must step forth into a huge, uncharted world in the morning to make her way alone; to make her fortune, or to mar it worse. Then came the supernatural visitor to break the oblivion which youthful sleep had brought, and to make Laura recall her pressing misfortunes down to their dregs.

“I read her mind and her memory almost clearly now,” Editha thought; “but she does not faintly approach a knowledge of me. I will try again . . . there, a little harder willing and I should have almost made myself visible. But she only murmurs ‘Mother!’ ‘Mother!’ and fancies herself with

## A PEARL OUT OF SETTING

her. But I really have made some progress. She conveyed her thoughts to me, at least. Laura, I am no mere friend. I want to be your other soul, your wiser self. I will give you the power to face the world with a brave and a calm heart. I will try to influence all who are about you to bring you to your home and your kin."

"Stay with me, mother," Laura murmured once again in her sleep.

Day was sending its first messengers to rouse the east, so that the kindly influence of the Etherian, which could only be exerted between sunset and dawn, must quickly end. Reluctantly Editha threw around the sleeping girl a last intenser effort of her personality, and focused her mind, with its message of hope and courage, strongly on the sleeper's brain, as if to bathe her in an assurance of security. Then she kissed Laura's cheek and was gone.

She paused a moment at her husband's bedside, and charging Mrs. Lamont, who was still there, to assist her in arousing the Colonel's mind to the existence of this new-found niece, both Etherians combined their powers towards that end. They left the bedside together, and presently began to feel that relaxation of their energies which, in their state, corresponds to our sensation of sleep.

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

Laura slept peacefully and late that morning, with a smile upon her innocent lips, dreaming of walks by her mother's side, amid flowers and bright sunshine, when the two foresaw nothing of the misery which had since come to both. Some hours passed, and she was rudely awakened by a rough hand on her shoulder.

Bill Heintz had entered her chamber.

"Wake up," he said, in a hoarse whisper. "Listen! I'm going to take Mrs. Turley to the village this morning and keep her there. You be by the post-office at noon. 'Sh-h-h, she'll wake up. I am yer friend. You can't stay here—d'ye see? I'll get you out of this. Be at the post-office at noon. Bring anything you've got that you kin sell. You'll need everything you have, and more besides."

## CHAPTER III

### FROM BAD HANDS TO WORSE

LAURA was so startled that when Heintz had crept out she scarcely knew whether or not the incident was part of a dream. But now she heard him calling to Mrs. Turley; and, besides, her recollection of his touch upon her shoulder and of his startling proposal to her to fly from her home was too strong to be doubted. She weighed the reasons for and against accepting his offer of a rescue, reasons all born of her ignorance of life, and reluctantly decided to accompany him. Having the hopefulness of youth as an only substitute for worldly experience, she fancied that good fortune must befall her. The manner of taking the step, as planned by Heintz, weighed most against her going. It gave it an underhand, surreptitious look, like a flight. It was not in her nature even to contemplate such a procedure. The idea of it stung her with its implication of moral cowardice and dishonesty. The straightforward course must be hers—to notify Mrs. Turley, and to leave the

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

house with the same freedom and sense of dignity with which she had entered it. She dressed very slowly, to span the time until the landlady should be heard descending the stairs. Then she followed, and made her announcement in such a manner as gained for itself and for her the respect which the coarse creature, when sober, had never been able to deny to her lodger.

“I shall leave here to-day,” said Laura. “I shall not come back, except to give you what I owe and to take away my things.”

“I’m sorry yer goin’, miss,” said the woman.

Heintz listened with greedy and anxious ears, fearful that the girl was going to say that he was to be her companion. But, he thought, perhaps she was not going with him at all. This was a very different creature from the pale girl he had seen stunned with surprise, overwhelmed by abuse, and struck down in his presence yesterday. He doubted whether, if she really meant to be his companion, he would be able to carry out his part of the plan—with a proud, high-spirited mate so clearly of a world beyond his own.

“If you’re a-goin’ to pay me,” Mrs. Turley said, “I don’t jest see what makes you go away.”

“I shall go at noon,” said Laura.

“I’m sorry fer what I done yesterday,” said the

## FROM BAD HANDS TO WORSE

woman. "I was clean crazy with my troubles, or I wouldn't have carried on so."

"Have my breakfast ready as soon as possible, please, and call me," Laura said.

"Yes, ma'am," said the woman.

"She'll be goin' to her folks," said Mrs. Turley to Bill Heintz when the girl had gone. "They're fearful rich, I hear."

"She's a thoroughbred, and no mistake," said Bill. "Where is her folks, I wonder?"

"I don't know where they be," said Mrs. Turley; "but I've heard they're very tony and all that sort of thing. I hain't never stooped to do no spyin' on her. Her secrets hain't none of my funeral. All's I know is I made a 'nation fool of myself a-drivin' her out'n the house like I done. I won't get nothing now, 'cept jest what she owes me, 'less I kin make up with her afore she clears out."

"Oh, leave her be," said Bill. "Whatever you say 'll make things worse. What you want is a good bracer of whiskey to steady you. Better come down the road to Cunningham's with me."

"You kin go an' drink—an' drink—an' drink," said Mrs. Turley, from out of a grand spasm of virtue, "but you can't come it over me with none of yer rum and them mis'ble Cunninghams whose

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

house I was to yesterday. I got more'n paid fer goin' there wunst."

"Mrs. Turley, I'll jest hev yer to know—"

"You'll hev me to know nothing," said she. "I'm a-lettin' you know 't I washt my hands of you and your friends—there! You kin stuff that in your pipe and smoke on it."

I will not even hint at Heintz's reply to this assault upon him. If it be understood that he, too, had been drinking heavily and was in a highly nervous condition, perhaps even the nature of what he said had best remain obscure. Mrs. Turley, instead of practising her own masterly powers of invective upon him, waved him to be gone, and flung herself out of the room in order to stand in the pantry and listen for his departing footsteps. When she heard the gate slam she returned to busy herself with preparing her boarder's breakfast. But first she poured out half a glass of Bourbon and swallowed it neat, to fortify herself for whatever was to come.

I doubt if she so considered it, but this proved a waste of alcohol, for Laura would hold with her only what converse politeness demanded. To Mrs. Turley's clumsy apologies for her past behavior the young lady replied that it was best not to refer to that, and when Mrs. Turley tried with all

## FROM BAD HANDS TO WORSE

her ingenuity to discover the whereabouts of the rich relatives to whom she was certain her boarder was betaking herself, Laura only replied, "My plans are not very definite, Mrs. Turley." The girl's pride and reticence vanquished the low woman, who kept her temper by great force of will, because she thought there would be a money profit in good behavior. At the door she handed to Laura her small reticule of plaited straw, like a school-girl's bag, and saying that she hoped Mrs. Balm "would soon come back to her faculties again," the two women parted—one to return to the bottle, in which she found most comfort, the other to face a world so cruel that had she even suspected what it held for her, she might have shuddered at the gay sunlight that bathed its face.

Ahead of her, down the brown road, she saw an old beggar called Christmas, hobbling on the oaken third leg with which he made the best of his way, his natural legs being almost wrecked by lameness. He was called Christmas because of his white hair and beard, and perhaps because he drew all children to him. He had always a story for whatever child he met, and though not one of his tales—always about kittens, and frogs, or crows, or dogs—seemed worth any adult's

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

while to hear or repeat, children of every degree clamored for them.

“Good-morning, ma’am,” said Christmas. “You’re hurrying a good deal. Be you sure where you’re going?”

“Good-morning, Christmas,” said she, smiling, and passing on.

“Miss! stop a bit. Let me look at you. Ay, I thought so. Give a copper to old Christmas, though he’s got no good news for you.”

“I have not a penny to my name, Christmas,” said she.

“You’re changed since I passed you last time —a couple of days ago—down the road. The fairies have been to you. I see the mark of ‘em on your forehead, and what’s in your eyes is a fairy light, nothing else. I hope it ain’t a warning—and yet I’m ‘bleeged to say you’re in bad hands.”

“I’m in no one’s hands but my own.”

“Ay, bad hands, bad hands, I tell ye. It’s a warning that’s on your brow and in your eyes.”

“I wish I had a penny for you,” said Laura. “Good-morning, Christmas.”

She went her way and left him looking after her, shaking his white locks with nods of approval of his own words, and with sidewise shakes in

## FROM BAD HANDS TO WORSE

token of despair for her. Suddenly he hobbled after her, very painfully and quickly for him.

“Ma’am; I say, ma’am!” he called. “Here’s a quarter of a dollar for you for better fortune.”

“I cannot take your money, thank you, Christmas,” she said, with a sweet smile.

“You won’t?” he asked.

“I cannot, really,” she said.

“My God!” he exclaimed, dropping his staff and raising both hands. “Only a lamb would take to the road without thought of money. And do you know where lambs walk to? To the shearing first, and then to the—”

If he finished that sentence, it was with such a low muttering that she did not catch the last words. Again she started on, leaving him behind her.

While she had been at her meal and on the road, Bill Heintz was lounging with two young idlers—semi-vagabonds, but better men than he—before the post-office.

“Better come with us,” one repeated. “You don’t need a red cent, because if they engage you they take you to Ne’ York free, and pay yer for the work you do on the way. And ’tain’t hard work, nor bad work neither, looking after them horses and elephants and things in a big circus.

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

They're short of hands, and I know one of the head fellers, and he told me, he says, if me an' my friends would meet him in Harrisburg at a certain time, he'd git us a job. And after that meals and beds comes along with the job."

"But wait till you see the gal," said Heintz. "I tell you, she's a jim daisy. She's a thoroughbred. They say her folks is the richest kind of swells, but she's stuck on me, and we're going to be pardners."

"Ah, what 're yer givin' us? If she's a swell she won't have nothin' to do with the likes of you, only as you kin run arrants fer her. Don't I know what them swells is? Can't tell me nothin' new about 'em. They don't mix with poor folks. They might try, but it wouldn't work. They can't, anyhow; but who in — ever heard of their tryin'?"

"Come along with us," said the second loafer; "don't make a monkey of yourself. There's big pay an' easy work, and you kin see Ne' York to boot."

"We'll see about this here mixin'," said Bill, with a chuckle and a leer. "When she tumbles to what 'll happen to her before morning, through bein' along with me — just leave her to me, I say."

"'BUT, HULLO ! HERE SHE COMES NOW'"





## FROM BAD HANDS TO WORSE

"Oh, that's the lay, is it, Bill?" said one of his companions. "That's different."

"Danged different," said the other. "It means a trick in jail for you—if you have ordinary luck at that business."

"Ah, what's all this preaching?" Bill asked. "It makes me sick to hear you fellers. You haven't got the chance; that's what's the matter with youse. But, hullo! here she comes now."

As he spoke, Laura Balm turned a near corner, and approached the group with a quick, firm step. Her slender, muscular body, outlined with the promising curves of girlhood, was draped with a gown which fitted her as a deer is fitted by its fur. She held herself rigidly erect, her head was high, and in her blue eyes no more than in her gait was there any hint of misgiving.

"Good-morning," said Heintz, involuntarily straightening himself, and adopting the tone and manner of the humble before the proud.

"Good-morning," said she, as if she had not expected to see him, and forged ahead.

"I say!" he called. "Hold up, will you?"

But she walked on, and he was obliged to catch up to her, looking over his shoulder sheepishly at his companions, who had taken the exact measure of his control over her.

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“Is that little basket all you brought away?” he asked. “What’s in it?”

She told him that she had brought with her only a little very necessary clothing and a few letters of her mother’s. She had no right to take anything of value, she said, until her debt to Mrs. Turley was cleared.

“What! no joolry—and no clothes, neither?” he asked. He said he had reckoned she would fetch away things that could be turned into money. He thought she ought to go back and clean out the place while he kept Mrs. Turley away somewhere. To this she replied that what he proposed would be dishonest, and she would rather he would not talk of such things.

“It was kind of you to offer,” she added, “but I hardly see how it will be possible for you to help me.”

“Help you?” he repeated, as if he was going to repudiate the bare idea at the start. Then he finished the sentence more diplomatically. “I ain’t in much of a fix to help anybody, but maybe I can help you, and you can help me—as things turn up—and, anyhow, we kin be pardners.”

She searched his face with a look which turned his eyes to the ground.

“You advised me to leave Mrs. Turley’s,” said

## FROM BAD HANDS TO WORSE

she, "and I thank you for that, though I had already made up my mind to go to-day. But now have you any plan for helping me?"

"I jest said how—er—I reckoned we'd oughter be—er—pardners."

"Because," said she, disregarding what he said as unworthy her attention, "if you've nothing in mind, I think I will not trouble you any further."

He was nonplussed. His only plan was not one that he could make known to her. Moreover, her attitude, her holding herself so far from him, was a thing he had not taken into account.

"Well, look—a—here," he said, after a long pause; "we can drift along together, and—"

She turned another swift glance upon him.

"That is—I mean—and let me find work—for you to earn money—you see, and—"

He was confused. Her bearing disconcerted him. Each searching glance made him wince at his own villainy, and also made him feel the vast difference that separated them. Here was a duel between high character and low.

The country was now an open one. The only houses were behind them. The road lay between farm fences, with fields and pastures rolling away on either side. He noticed this. She may have done so, but she gave it no thought. She listened

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

to his hesitating speech and gathered the truth, that his companionship was all he had to offer. Almost unconsciously she drew away from him and quickened her pace.

“Say, you,” exclaimed the vagabond, hastening to put himself close to her side, “what are you up to? We’ll have this out right here. Are you a-trying to back out? Because if you are, it don’t go—see?”

He felt the futility of trying to fraternize with her. He knew of no alternative but violence. A tremor of alarm passed over her, but it was only momentary.

“I don’t understand you,” said she.

“Well, I’ll soon make you understand me. Your airs is makin’ me tired.” Thus spoke Cotton enraged at Silk.

“I am sorry to anger you,” said the silken one, calmly, “but you have no right to question me.”

“’Ain’t I? Well, we’ll soon see,” said the loafer. “I’m quittin’ good money and home an’ everything jest fer to be friendly, and you’re making a monkey of me. These here ’ristocratic airs of yourn don’t go—d’ye understand? I ain’t a-goin’ to put up with ‘em no longer.”

“You must not try to frighten me,” said Laura, stopping still and confronting him with a fearless



“ ‘I’M A BAD EGG, I AM’”



## FROM BAD HANDS TO WORSE

look. "And do not talk of our being partners or of our drifting along together. It is absurd. You will do better to turn back at once, as you're only wasting your time."

"Well, I'm —," said he, thrusting his bestial face almost against hers, nastily, to put an end to any doubt as to his intentions. "If it's talking straight you want, I'll talk straight every time. You and me's pardners, and you can't help yourself. I'm a bad egg, I am ; and I'm worst when I git riled. Everybody knows I'm bad, and everybody knows you've come away with me, and we've took to the road together. You can't never hold your head up after this—d'ye see? So what's the use of kicking? Whatever I say 'll be believed, and I'll say whatever suits me. Now you just climb along till I say to stop."

"Leave me, you wicked man. How dare you talk to me so?" said the girl, with her eyes blazing and a voice so strong and firm that it sounded strange to her own ears.

"By jingo! hain't you pretty?" Heintz said. "There's money in that face for me. Oh, I hain't no fool! See here, if you've got the price of a parson, I'll marry you ; there, that's fair, ain't it? I'll marry you at the first parson's we come to. 'Tain't that I care fer it, because it 'll be all the

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

same to me by morning, but I'll do that much  
for to please you."

"Go away! Leave me at once!" said Laura,  
thoroughly frightened, yet still facing him like  
a lioness.

"How much money have you got, anyhow?"  
Bill asked. "Here, fork over that basket." He  
seized it with one hand and twisted her wrist  
with the other until she let go of the basket.  
"There!" said he; "what's yours is mine, and  
that's fair."

At the same instant a farm gate opened close  
beside them, and Christmas stepped through it  
and upon the road. Following an impulse, he had  
reached the scene quickly by a short-cut across  
the fields. His stout staff was gripped by its  
middle in his muscular right hand. At sight of  
him the bully shrank back a few steps.

"Good-morning again," said Christmas to the  
young lady. "Well met—very well met. If you  
were going back to your home, we could tramp  
it together, but you'd have to tramp it a leetle  
slow, account of my legs."

"I have no home," Laura said. She showed  
acceptance of his protection, however, by stepping  
towards him as quickly as Heintz had stepped the  
other way. If the old beggar had been known to

## FROM BAD HANDS TO WORSE

her as Prince Charming in disguise, she could not have shown more pleasure in his company.

“Here, damn you!” Heintz shouted, “leave that girl be ; she’s with me—d’ye see ?”

Christmas stepped from Laura to Heintz, and still balancing his staff with ominous readiness to use it, he said : “Such as you are fitter for such as she to walk on than to walk with. Give me that basket.”

“I’d like to see myself. It’s mine. You mind your own business. I hain’t done nothing to you —like I will, if you go to bother me.”

“Put back in the basket what you’ve stolen out of it, and hand it over to me,” said Christmas. “I’ll ask you once again, though I seem to see that you’ll keep what you’ve took ; ay, and I seem to see the hand of the law upon you.”

Christmas closed his eyes as he uttered the last sentence, speaking the words in a deep bass voice. Such was his manner when he prophesied, or gave warnings, to the poor women of a wide territory, who believed him to be supernaturally gifted.

“I hain’t took nothin’, I tell yer,” said Heintz.

“Give me the basket, and keep what you’ve stolen.”

“Oh, I hain’t a-scared of your spells. Keep ‘em for the old women.”

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“The basket, I say—quick,” said Christmas.

“Ah! who cares for you?” said Heintz, proving much slower in anger with a man than he had shown himself with a tipsy woman on the previous day. “There! I’ll hand it to her—see? And I’ll do more’n that; I’ll walk along with her, as I’ve a right to do.”

Heintz started towards Laura, but Christmas commanded him so threateningly not to go another step nearer her that he dropped the basket in the road and allowed Christmas to pick it up, while he stood by completely cowed.

“Walk where you please,” said Christmas, “but come within reach of this stick, and I’ll beat you like a carpet. Now the young lady and I will be going along.”

Heintz followed at a gradually widening distance, occasionally shying a stone after the girl and her deliverer, aiming each one to fall short of the mark, but to let its click be heard in the road behind them. Between these declarations of his harmlessness he fumbled in his pocket the thing he had filched from the basket. It was a small package. He did not know that it contained nothing but old letters; nothing else to him, but to Laura Balm the most important of her possessions.

## CHAPTER IV

### AGAIN WITH THE ETHERIANS

CHRISTMAS walked a step behind Laura, and, to further show his respect for her—and for himself—spoke only when she addressed him, nearly always with a “Yes, ma’am,” or “Of course, miss.” Heintz slunk, wolflike, well behind the strange pair. When they neared the outskirts of Powellton the old man bought some cake and a bottle of milk, and, at a gateway to a tree-edged field, he asked if she would not go in out of the public view to rest and refresh herself. She assented trustingly, and he waited upon her, opening the bottle and teaching her how to drink out of it, and handing her the paper bag of cakes. All the while he chuckled and grinned like a man who recollects a funny story.

“What amuses you so, Christmas?” Laura asked.

“You don’t think what you’ve gone and done, miss,” he answered.

“Why, what have I done?” she asked.

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“ You’ve been fed by a beggar,” said he. “ And may the day be soon coming when you’ll think it so wonderful you’ll hardly believe it yourself; but you’ll never see the joke as I do, at the time of it.”

“ There! I’ve done wrong,” said she. “ I am so ignorant. I never have had to think or to do for myself, Christmas. All my life I have scarcely had a thought that I did not take from my mother or share with her. I was hungry and tired, and, selfishly, I did not give heed to anything else.”

“ Young ladies oughtn’t to worry about anything. You’ve only taken your own, after all. I had a piece of silver that was yours, you know—besides several more of my own; and you’ve only taken half of it, so far. If you think of me at all, think how proud I am to be helping you. You don’t despise old Christmas, do you? Well, I’m afraid most folks do, miss.”

As she sat at the foot of a great elm, resting after she had eaten, Christmas asked her what she knew of the fairy charm that had touched her. “ Because,” he said, “ I know you’ve met with a fairy. What shape had it? Don’t you know? Well, then, did ever a rabbit leap into your lap, or a sparrow light on your shoulder or brush

## AGAIN WITH THE ETHERIANS

your hair when flying over you; or maybe, now, it was just a lame dog that licked your hand? No? Well, it's sure to have been something, and you should remember, because you would have been kind to it—fed it, or stroked it, or something. You can't remember, ma'am? That's very strange. I knew a little boy at the Mill. Johnny Guard, I mean. You didn't know him? Well, his parents (ignorant people, narrow's pins) they found a little frog in his bed three mornings in succession. Twice they flung it out doors, and the third time Mrs. Guard took it in her apron and tossed it in the kitchen fire. Oh, what terrible things is done in ignorance! The fire would never burn after that, not if they poured a gallon of kerosene onto it. All 'twould do was to smoke and smoke and drive 'em all out of the house. They come a-hunting for me, and laid the matter before me, as not being so narrow as themselves. I never had the heart to tell them what they'd done. All I said was, 'Bad business, bad business, and worse to come.' They had to hire workmen, who found that the bricks had fallen in and choked the chim-bly, and, being very poor, they thought the bill they had to pay was what I meant. They came to me again, and I daresn't tell them the truth. That poor little froggie was a fairy—a good fairy,

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

of course—because it took the shape of something that couldn't hurt nobody, and so was bringing good fortune. No, I hadn't the courage to tell 'em, so all I did was to say again, 'Bad business, and worse to come.' They knew what I meant in nine days from the day they tried to kill the fairy, for 'twas on the ninth day that Johnny Guard was burned up a-playing with the very kitchen fire where they threw the poor frog."

"You are famous for your stories, Christmas," said Laura.

"For my stories, ma'am, but not for any lies; 'cause them I never tell," said Christmas. "And now may I ask what have the fairies to do with you? Your fortune's come to a turning-point—but how? What are you and old Christmas doing here under the bare sky on the public road, without a roof to either of us? Why are you leaving Mrs. Turley's, ma'am? Don't mind telling me, 'cause I'll keep a close mouth, as well as guard you on your way. But which is your way? Where are your people; and why are you with old Christmas?"

With complete frankness Laura told of her utter friendlessness—a story which old Christmas, with his inborn fancy for the mysterious and the uncommon, absorbed without a murmur of surprise.

## AGAIN WITH THE ETHERIANS

She said that her father's business held him in Europe; but where he lived her mother never told her. She had lately begun to think her mother did not hear from him, because the only letters she left behind were from a firm of lawyers in New York, and these merely enclosed the money she received once a fortnight. Her mother was the only sister of a bachelor who was believed to have been long since dead. Laura thought they lived in grand style—this bachelor and her mother. She judged this from various remarks her mother had made at odd times. Her mother had differed with this brother, and left home years and years ago; but where that home was, and what relatives were left there, or anywhere, she had never told her daughter, though she had often said she intended doing so at some later day.

“Ah, well. Keep heart, miss,” said the old man, with the words and tone the poor so quickly learn to adopt towards one another. “A brave heart is all one needs when the clouds are black, with never a star showing, and the road is dark, with never a house upon it, and the way is long, with never a turning. Keep heart in such a case, I say, and all's sure to be well. But now we must be up and moving, in order to get where we'll be

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

going before dark. I know a kind heart in a calico gown that won't never turn you away."

The heart which inhabited that modest gown proved to animate a very robust body too large for the gown, and straining at its buttons as if they would at any instant fly from their threads like bullets from a gun. She presided over the stove of the kitchen of the Powellton Hotel, and she possessed, in addition to the heart and the threatening buttons, a tongue which gave the lie to every promise suggested by her rosy face and round body.

"Hello! What do you want here, Mr. Tramp?" said the woman, Mrs. Newbold by name. "I 'ain't got nothing for you, so you may as well be off about your business, if tramps have any business. In times like these, with the whole country prosterated, and nobody able to buy food or drink, or even to pay for what they have eat and drunk, ain't it likely that I'm going to throw good food away on an able-bodied old vaggerbone that could work but won't do it so long as others 'll work for him and give him what they've earned? Well? Think I want to stand screamin' what I've got to say? Come in—if you must have the truth told you—and sit down, so I can say my say easy like, 'stead of tirin' out my lungs hollerin' before I've

## AGAIN WITH THE ETHERIANS

said the half of it. Bless my bonnet! What's the matter with the man? Here, Christmas, back with you, I say. Let me have none of your nonsense."

The matter with Christmas—to make him "so long a-coming," like his namesake—was that Laura had retreated at the sound of the cook's voice, and he had gone after her to assure her that no bite accompanied the noisy bark.

"Oh, back you've come, eh? I reckoned you would," Mrs. Newbold said. "And what have you got with you, in patience' name?"

"A lady, ma'am," said Christmas, whose sense of humor, at announcing the conjunction of himself with a lady, must have troubled him.

"Well, mind she wipes her feet, if she's a lady, instead of disteributing the whole dirt of the stable-yard over my kitchin, as you've done, for me to clean up after you. A lady, eh? Well, she looks more the lady than to be vaggerboning about with you, I will say. Now, then, miss, if you venture in my kitchin, you'll have to hear plain speech. What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Beg your pardon, ma'am; she—"

"Who asked you about her?" Mrs. Newbold exclaimed. "Is she such a monsterosity as to be a woman without power of speech? Then I'll hear

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

her—comin' in other people's houses and expecting I don't know what! Was there ever such a magnet like as I am, drawin' in everything off the road, as if they was moths and I was a lamp?"

"I expect nothing of you," said Laura, with no note of dependence or apology in her voice. "I'm here because I was asked to come. I want nothing of any one except what I am able to earn."

"Well, sit down—sit down, both of you. Was there no chairs where you come from, Christmas; or did they bite, so you was afraid of 'em? I'll make you a cup of coffee, miss, and no trouble at all. You're not interuding here, I'm sure. You, Christmas, shall have what you know very well you always get; though, 'pon my word, you've come upon me just as I am rushed with the evening's orders for steaks and chops, and Lord knows what all—at least, there's been no orders at all yet, but little you'd care. And what can you do, miss, to earn your living?"

"I can teach French and German," Laura said, "and the piano; or, if I had a room and very little money to begin with, I could paint in water-colors—a little."

The tornado of ridicule or scorn which the reader might well expect to be let loose by this extraordinary announcement to a cook in a coun-

## AGAIN WITH THE ETHERIANS

try kitchen was also anticipated by Christmas, but it did not rage. Instead, Mrs. Newbold stared at Laura, gasped, choked something down, and—began to mop her eyes with her apron. When she spoke it was with a broken voice. She wore all her feelings outside, and they were even more insecure than her threatening buttons.

“Christmas,” she asked, “did you ever hear such cruelty? It’s a thing I never could stand, is cruelty. Such a lady, and so young; and right here in my kitchin, of all places! Oh, the cruelty, the exteriordinary cruelty! Here, Christmas, come out with me a moment. I want a word with you.”

She hurried the hobbling old man outside the door, and there fell upon him, saying: “Whatever cloud did that poor bit of china drop from? Tell me every mortal thing about her, for I’m burnin’ with curiosity and drenched with pity for her at the same time.”

The result of the little that Christmas could tell her was that she shook out her apron as if to empty and dust it of all responsibility for Laura Balm. She declared there was no use; her husband’s bed would not hold three—but the young lady should have a good dinner and a chair to rest upon. More could not be wrung from possi-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

bility. And she went back into the kitchen with both hands upraised in helplessness, as if the greatest of all highwaymen, Fate, had ordered them up, and there was no recourse but to obey. Christmas lumbered away ; and soon after, Bill Heintz crept around the back of the hotel, and flattening his face against the kitchen window, espied Laura. Then he crept back, and entering the bar-room, waited for his cronies from Lingard's Mill to come along.

The day that was drawing to its close had been busy and fateful, yet it had not emptied half the happenings it held. Archibald Paton had gone, in the morning, to the old Colonel's bedside, to bid him farewell, and to express contrition for having lost his temper. Care and trouble rode him lightly, and time had already dulled the words that had stung him the day before.

“ Come, uncle,” said he, “ let's be good friends. I'm going back to my work to-day. I'm sorry to upset your plans, but I'm better off as I am than playing the country gentleman ; besides, I couldn't change my name. No, really, I couldn't—though I'd do almost anything to oblige you.”

“ You won't be asked a second time,” said the old Colonel. “ You have the spirit of the Lamonts, boy ; why the devil haven't you got some

## AGAIN WITH THE ETHERIANS

of their common-sense? Go along and chuckle over the mess you have made of your prospects. Humph! Good-bye, sir. I'll find some one yet who will give me a thank you for my fortune."

The old family lawyer was by, and when Archibald had lightly grasped the old man's hand and tiptoed out, the Colonel spoke to the lawyer.

"He's a plucky lad, Borrowes," said he. "Spite of the mess he has made in my plans, I like him. Rewrite the will without the condition that he shall change his name. I'll only sign it if I have to; and, by the Eternal! I'll hate to do it even then. It's honest pride against dirty pride, so let the boy take whatever dirty pride brings him. Have you spoken finally to my other nephew, Jack? The devil himself can't get me to feed that fellow's vices with my honest money. Did you tell him what I said — that all he'll get by hanging about here is a term in jail? You didn't? Now why are my last wishes disobeyed? Between you all, you think, because you've got me in bed, you've no call to respect me any longer. By the Eternal! Borrowes, you spare no one by tempering my commands. I'm not dead yet, d'ye hear me? I'll up and into my clothes, and have that rogue haled before Squire Lewis, and I'll have him given three months, if he isn't out of this neigh-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

borhood at once. He's up to mischief. He's plotting something. Don't I tell you I've taken to dreaming about him? Oh, if I'd asked Archibald to rid the neighborhood of the loafer, he'd have done it; but I left it to you."

"I told Mr. Lamont he was to get nothing; that's enough," said the lawyer. "There is nothing now to keep him here."

"That's the lawyer of it, Borrowes. Talk—talk—talk, but precious little else do you do. Isn't he hanging about? Answer me—isn't he? Well, let me be, man. I want to sleep. I'm stronger for my sleep of late; and I have my own way, in my dreams."

It was Mrs. Lamont, his mother, who willed that the dying man should suddenly demand sleep at the edge of a surrender to a violent outburst of temper. In his feebleness and age he was once again a child to her, and, as of old, her command over him was great. She simply enfolded him in her presence, as she had pressed his infant form close against hers seventy years before, and he yielded as she soothed and bade him sleep.

Many of the Etherians who had made up the first assembly at the Clock House were now missing. Conscious that their value in the subsequent developments of the drama did not warrant their

## AGAIN WITH THE ETHERIANS

renewed activity in mortal affairs, they had withdrawn. The principal ones, however, were still absorbed in the tasks they had set themselves. Editha, for instance, had taken her place beside Laura in the tavern kitchen, and between the gusts of Mrs. Newbold's chatter had made the young lady aware of her sympathy for the day's happenings. Again the influence of this gentle friend caused Laura's mind to centre upon her mother, so that she remarked to Mrs. Newbold that her mother had seemed to be with her in her sleep the night before, and that she longed for sleep to come again, simply in the hope that her mother would again soothe and caress her. The words distressed her unseen companion, magnifying her fears for the ultimate strength of an influence which could not even make its source apparent. Still she hovered beside her charge and prayed for power over her.

When old Christmas came, as he did at about nine o'clock, to whisper to Mrs. Newbold that he had found no bed for the girl, Editha was moved to accompany him out upon the silent country road in order to examine the true state of his mind towards the girl. To her surprise and delight, she found that she could communicate with him with remarkable freedom; almost, she

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

thought, as if he had passed the barriers of mortality.

Unselfishness clears the way for Etherian counsel better than any attribute men and women possess—and Christmas was notably unselfish.

The spectacle of the gentle lady, whose nature had been refined through generations to the utmost delicacy, strolling at night in intimate converse with such a character as Christmas, was such as purely human conditions seldom parallel.

“In bad hands—bad hands,” said the beggar, when she plied him with searchings of his soul. “And such a hot-house bud, as well—that a harsh breath ’d kill. If the fairies wasn’t meddling with her, I dun’no’ what ’d happen ; but, pshaw ! what can fairies do ?”

“What better can you do ?” Editha asked.

“But whatever can I do, who would give one of my arms just to bring her a bed for to-night ? Nothing—not a thing. Sometimes I see yon and yon—yonner than I want to. And so I see her now going from trouble to worse trouble. But, dear me ! why do I bother about her when I can do no good ? And I’ve bothered now more than I ever troubled about anybody, even myself, in all my life.”

## AGAIN WITH THE ETHERIANS

Still the kindly spirit clung to him and focused her mind upon his.

“Money, eh? Money for me, maybe, if I can bring her to her own! What use have I for money? I have plenty—two dollars about, and some coppers. What’s the use of putting money in my head? I never did a thing for money; only things to people that couldn’t pay a cent, that was in trouble—old women mostly—and when it was no trouble to me. But she is poor now, and she is in trouble; then this is one of my partickler cases. Humph! I see. I’m blamed if I ain’t getting my second sight. I believe if I blind myself I can see yon—as far yon as ever I did. Think of poor old Christmas seeing into happenings befalling to such as she is, when the most I’ve been and done before was concerning lost cows and stolen change and the lucks of dirty-faced laborers’ children! It’s worth trying, anyhow.”

Christmas came to a gate in a garden wall, and pushing it gently open, walked in and chose a place between some bushes and a wall where he would be out of sight. Then he let his staff fall, and used both hands to take a great red bandanna handkerchief out of his pocket and bind it tightly around his head, covering both his eyes. This done, he found a pack of tattered old playing-cards

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

in another pocket, and began to cut and shuffle them, for no better reason than that he had always heard of playing-cards as possessing some mysterious affinity with the future. Therefore he always carried a pack and fumbled it, without plan or system.

Editha stood beside him, amused at his nonsense, but hopeful of his powers.

"Yes, yes; I see!—I see!" he exclaimed. "Oh, she's got rich relations. Well, of course, any one would know that. But what's this? They want to make her rich and are hunting for her, and she doesn't know them! I see. Not the same name as hers. But what name? I cannot get to see the name. No, it's no use trying. A package that Heintz stole (I knew he stole something). Umph, umph! some clew in it; but how is this? He's to be let alone, and it too, and it will get him punished. She needs me to-night. Dark road, wicked man, tall, black hair, bad eyes. Ah ha! I'm not to take her away, only be near them. And then—umph, umph! I see—New York. Yes, yes. So? Umph!" (Thus he kept commenting as the light flowed into his mind.) "But the main thing now is to-night. Dark road, bad man. Yes, yes."

He took the bandage from his eyes, and grasped the bush to keep from falling.

## AGAIN WITH THE ETHERIANS

“Guns!” he exclaimed. “Seeing so far is terrible tiring. But, thank God, there’s other friends for her than me. On each side of the trouble-places there is always friends. Then she will be got safely by all of them. But I mustn’t say that, for I didn’t see it.”

Jack Lamont, troubled, angry, biting his mustache as he swung along the road, stopped at the Powellton Hotel, and walked into the bar-room. He carried with him something of the look of a gentleman, but it was the sporting type he stood for. His brown alpine hat, the shortness of his light brown overcoat, and the size of his scarf-pin and watch-chain suggested that he concerned himself with racing-horses, and had caught the fashion and dress of horsy men. He was tall and of powerful build, yet very graceful, though a trifle too jaunty to match the promise of his features. And they had more and nearer things to contend with, in the struggle of gentility against dissipation which raged through his life, for the minor markings of his face were lines traced by low appetites and allegiance to degrading habits. Jack Lamont was a man who fancied he was having his way, whereas, as in all such cases, it was his way that was having him.

His mother’s spirit had been his companion since

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

dusk. She knew at least the immediate future and the active part it would call upon him to play. Her hope was that, since he had been disowned, she might yet find a way for him to have at least a hand in the old Colonel's coffers. None of the Etherians had told her this was impossible as they had scanned what was to happen. But, on the other hand, she had not thought it wise to question them so closely that they might guess her secret aims. They had all contented themselves with seeing her son disowned; perhaps they had helped to bring about that disaster. It amused her to fancy that they would rest with that, and to believe herself more clever than all of them.

Lamont lounged up to the bar and ordered a drink. He had meant to carry it to a table and enjoy it slowly with a cigar, but already at a table at the end of the room were Bill Heintz and his pals of the morning, and Lamont at once became interested in their noisy conversation. They were discussing a young lady of great beauty and innocence who, so Heintz said, was now in the kitchen of the tavern, and who belonged to him, he having induced her to run away from her home. He was tipsy, and larded his talk with many oaths to emphasize what he said he would do to break her spirit if he decided to part with his com-

## AGAIN WITH THE ETHERIANS

panions and follow his original plan of sticking to "the gal," and forcing her to work and supply him with money. He said nothing about her having been rescued from him, or about her having been brought to the tavern by any other than himself. However, his companions suspected that something disturbing to his plans had occurred, since he showed no haste to join her; besides, he protested with suspicious violence and reiteration that she was as good as his bride, yet he had spent hours at dawdling with them. They urged him to let her go her own way. They argued that she was not the kind to take up with him. They said she must have powerful friends, and that he could only get his way with her by some act that spelled prison in unmistakable and large capitals.

"An adventure!" said Deborah Lamont, in her son's ear. "A pretty girl in danger—plotted against by a drunken ruffian. Go around to the kitchen and see if what they say is true. Hurry! To her rescue! You cannot tell to what this may lead."

## CHAPTER V

### 'TWIXT NIGHT AND MORNING

THERE are some suggestions that a man will follow more quickly than others, and there are hints which may be acted upon with broader intent than the giver of them can be blamed for. Mrs. Deborah Lamont knew that the young woman was Laura Balm, and that she was a niece of the Colonel's and a cousin of Jack's. There is no ground for leaping to the thought that she meant a whit more than to make the couple acquainted. If the result should be to arouse in Laura gratitude to the man, or a warmer emotion, so much the better for her plans.

Jack waited only to drain his glass, and then passed around to the stable-yard, and reaching the kitchen, looked in. He saw Laura, and one glance whetted his desire for another, longer look, so he stood in the deep shadow of an open shed and studied the scene. He recognized Laura as the tear-stained girl he had met and spoken to at Lingard's Mill. There was his cue for a subject

## 'TWIXT NIGHT AND MORNING

of conversation with her. His Etherian counsellor kept urging him to lose no time, to offer his services to Laura, to take her away.

“But where can I take her?” he asked himself. Instantly the answer came to his mind, lodged there by his mother’s wit.

“Of course,” he said; “to the lodge of the Clock House. The very thing! The gardener’s my man, through thick and thin.”

He crossed the stable-yard and entered the kitchen.

“Good-evening, miss,” he said, bowing to Laura. “Once again I am going to offer you assistance, and this time I beg you not to refuse it. I have heard a low fellow in the bar-room planning to annoy you, and am come to offer you shelter out of his reach, and in a fitter place for you than this. I can take you to those who will at least make you comfortable, and more, if they can see their way to do it. They are relatives of mine who live near by. Please believe me anxious to serve you, and pardon me for giving you alarm, but I think there is no time to spare.”

Editha’s influence, strongly exerted, urged Laura to accept the offer. “I do not see how she is to be brought to her own,” Editha thought. “I do not foresee how this scapegrace is to serve as an agent

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

of good, but though my poor foresight is confused beyond this unexpected emergency, I am certain, nevertheless, that his offer is providential."

Mrs. Newbold, the cook, had entered the room in time to hear a part of what Lamont said to Laura. She knew him merely as the man to whom public rumor pointed as the probable heir of a great near-by estate, and who had recently come to Powellton from New York.

"I am very sorry—but I do not know you, sir," Laura said. She was puzzled by the contradictory promptings of her nature and of her spirit adviser. "I am sure you really fancy me in danger, but I am not in any. The man of whom you speak has already attempted his worst, I think, this afternoon; but a poor old beggar was able to alarm him even more than he frightened me."

"The gentleman is Mr. Lamont, I believe," said Mrs. Newbold, "of the best family here, miss. I think you had better go with him."

"May I not stay here?" Laura asked. "I really much prefer it; just to sit here, as I am doing, till morning comes, is all I ask."

"I would give you a bed, miss, if it was possible, and a room to yourself, as you deserve," said Mrs. Newbold, "but I cannot; and even if you could stand the cold and lonesomeness here after the

## 'TWIXT NIGHT AND MORNING

room is darkened and gets chilly, I have no right to let you stay, being as I'm only a servant."

"Yes, yes, accept his offer," urged Editha.

"You had much better go with the gentleman," the cook persisted.

"I'm afraid I must accept your kind offer, sir," Laura said, reluctantly. "I do not like to impose upon you, but I really have no choice. I have left my home, I have no friends, and I am trying to make my way to New York. I scarcely know what to do—how to act under such circumstances. I—oh, sir—oh, madam—I had rather die than be so helpless, so driven about. I—"

Now the first tears she had shed since she had been felled by the blow in the cottage at Lingard's Mill burst from her in a torrent. The kindly cook patted her shoulder, and now and then cried a little in concert with her. Jack fidgeted with impatience, and at last gently urged the girl, with a hand at her elbow, to go out into the fresh air and walk herself into better spirits.

They went out into the darkness together. And Christmas, who had been courting sleep in a wagon in the stable-yard, hobbled after them.

When they had walked rapidly for about ten minutes, Lamont, who had shown extraordinary self-control for an unwonted period, drew Laura's

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

arm under his with the pretence that in this way they could make better time journeying. She did not disengage her arm, and this so emboldened him that he presently released it of his own accord, but only to place his around her waist and bring her closer to him with an ardent embrace.

She sprang from him as a deer might at the shock of a bullet wound. Then she stood still at three paces from him.

“Why, what’s the matter?” he asked.

“I will trouble you to let me go my own way,” said she.

“Why do you say that?” he asked, stepping towards her.

“Because you—you shall not treat me so; leave me alone and I will be obliged to you.”

Seeing that he had misjudged her—or, at least, that he had acted too hastily—he apologized very handsomely, saying that he felt like a brother towards her, and had only meant to comfort her. He promised not to transgress again. At the same moment Christmas came up to them, singing in a cracked voice what he evidently meant to be a cheering song, to apprise her of his presence. She felt the strong urging of her guardian spirit as well, and so she accepted Lamont’s apology and again walked on beside him. Just inside the

## 'TWIXT NIGHT AND MORNING

Clock House grounds Jack tapped on the door of the lodge, and the gardener opened it. He was bidden to give the young lady a bed and to see that she was well cared for. These instructions, so unlike any that he had ever received or expected, amazed the gardener. When he had seen Laura into the cottage, after she had thanked Lamont and bidden him good-night, the gardener closed the door and waited outside it for an explanation.

"Quare thing this, Mistur Lamont," said the man. "Hope there ain't nothing wrong about it—'nd that no trouble 'll come to me—or to you—or to the leddy—along of it, Mistur Lamont."

"There'll be trouble for you if you don't take good care of her. She's a friend of mine," said Lamont. "I'll call for her in the morning, and between now and then no one but you will be the wiser if you hold your tongue. If you do, I'll do the right thing—understand? If there's trouble, it 'll fall on you, and you'll lose a good tip in the bargain."

"Oh, it's all right," said the man. "No harrum in wanting to be tould everything's right, is there, Mistur Lamont? She'll have your room, th' only one there is. And where'll you slape, sir?"

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“I’m going to the hotel,” said Lamont, and, turning on his heel, disappeared in the darkness.

Editha went with the speed of light to the Colonel’s room to consult with Mrs. Isabel.

“You are quivering with news, but I think I know it all,” said the elder Etherian.

“She’s here! She’s on the grounds—in the lodge!” said the younger one. “Jack brought her—with no honorable intent, you may be sure—yet I urged her to come with him as the only way to bring her here.”

“It is well, but not nearly so well as you imagine, my dear,” Mrs. Isabel said. “You are better satisfied with your powers at last, I hope?”

“Oh no; I am wretchedly weak. I am not sure that I did anything. I am only certain that I tried. I do soothe and comfort her; of that I am sure. But, mother, do you understand the part Mrs. Deborah is playing? Do you know that it is she who is influencing her son Jack in his horrible course?”

“I have seen it all. If I were quite sure that Deborah could be so wicked as to plan the infamy that is in that man’s mind, I would rid this situation of her influence at once.”

“Could you? Have we the power to do that?”

“It would be awful, my dear. It is a power we

## 'TWIXT NIGHT AND MORNING

seldom invoke, and then only with fearful danger to ourselves, should we prove to have invoked it carelessly, yet I would not hesitate. But I am not yet clear in my mind beyond the fact that Deborah knows Laura's future and wishes to connect her son with it. However, now it is my turn to be of service. Watch the Colonel. See what you will be able to do yourself, presently, if you are not easily discouraged, but persist until your will gains the mastery over whatever human minds are in sympathy with it."

Mrs. Lamont bent over the old man's head as it lay on the pillow beside her. For a full minute she did not move, though he quickly began to evince restlessness, to show signs of waking, and to mutter in his broken sleep. At last she rose, and as she did so he sat up in bed.

"Tappin! Tappin! Where are you, Tappin?" he called, with his piping voice. "Tappin, I say!"

The house-keeper appeared in the doorway to the passage.

"Oh, Miss Johnson, is it you? Some of you ought to keep about. I've been calling for a quarter of an hour. My nephew Jack is on the premises. Don't ask me how I know. I do know; I can feel him, like a change in the weather. I think he is at the lodge; at all events, he is somewhere

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

on the premises, and I want him sent about his business, and not allowed in again. Take one of the men with you and go to the lodge. The scoundrel has left something there—I can't make out what. See what he has been doing, will you, Miss Johnson, and not stand gaping there all night."

When Miss Johnson conveyed to the gardener the statement that young Mr. Lamont had been there, and that she wished to know what he had brought, the man was too much astonished to help betraying himself by an exclamation.

"The Colonel spoke as if he saw him hanging about here," said Miss Johnson. "Yes, and as if he saw what he brought with him."

"What an ould divil he is!" the gardener said. "Then my fat's in the fire."

"Not at all," said Miss Johnson. "You're not blamable so long as you don't let in the young master in future."

"I'll see to that," said the man. "As I was saying to mesilf—not liking the business at all—th' ould fox is better worth serving, near dead as he is, than the young un who's been cut off. And I'll say it to the young man's face, too, if he comes. Eh, what is it?"

Through the chink at the back of the door the

## 'TWIXT NIGHT AND MORNING

house-keeper had seen Laura seated before the stove, for she had not yet been shown to the bedroom, which the gardener was tidying up when Miss Johnson's knock called him down.

"Aye," said the gardener, "that's what young Mr. Lamont brought, though 't puzzles me th' ould man should see her through half a dozen walls."

After hearing a few words in further explanation of the young lady's presence, Miss Johnson entered the lodge and talked with Laura. The result of the interview was that (by the aid of two intensely ardent Etherians) Laura's almost child-like simplicity and her helplessness told strongly on the house-keeper's sympathy. She was not unmoved, either, by a thought of how narrow had been the young creature's escape from the shock of too close an acquaintance with the younger Lamont. Guided by Editha and old Mrs. Lamont—though without a suspicion of the fact—she even analyzed Laura's feelings. She saw that Laura realized the strangeness and delicacy of her position, and would start and fly into the night again if she got an inkling of the status of Jack Lamont in that household. Indeed, the house-keeper felt certain she could do nothing with Laura unless she echoed the confidence and heartiness with which Jack had offered her shelter.

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“It’s an odd thing I’m going to do,” she whispered to the gardener, “and I can’t imagine how such boldness has come upon me, but I’ll take the poor thing to the house for to-night, and give her breakfast before she takes up her lonely way. I will; my mind’s made up. The Colonel will never know it, and who else is there to fear?”

The gardener shook his head. “Bricks is as clear as glash to th’ ould wizard,” he muttered.

“Well, miss, if you’re ready, please come with me,” said Miss Johnson. “Mr. Lamont said you’d find friends here, and his word shall be kept, though you have a way of making friends for yourself. It’s only a minute’s walk. Mind the second step; there, now, we’ll soon have you as snug and warm in bed as ever you were, or can be.”

The house-keeper had none too much courage left when she had actually brought Laura into the house, but the Colonel’s mother and wife cast their spells with such effect that it seemed as though the very atmosphere in-doors was instinct with approval of what she was doing. At the outset she had intended to take the gentle waif to a disused servant’s room at the top of the house, but she found herself halting opposite the guest-chamber, two rooms from the one in which

## 'TWIXT NIGHT AND MORNING

the dying man was lying, and in direct connection with it through an intervening chamber.

“And why not this room?” The suggestion came from Mrs. Isabel Lamont in a thought-whisper in the house-keeper’s ear.

“And why not here?” she asked herself. “In for a penny, in for a pound. She shall have this room, which is sure to be ready.”

Thus convoyed by the house-keeper and her two invisible allies, Laura, still carrying her absurd little basket, was shown into the guest-chamber with its great four-poster mahogany bed, a mound of snow-white drapery beneath a canopy of chintz. The soft rugs upon the polished floor, the walls panelled with old oak, the spacious George II. fireplace, and the lustrous mahogany furniture gave it not only a warm and cheerful tone, but what we may call a “picture appearance,” which charmed the girl. It was a framing suitable for one of her exquisite beauty and refinement. She was left alone to look around her, while the head servant went out to fill the water-pitcher, and her eyes swam with tears as she realized the depth of comfort that lay about her, that hedged around even the servants in that substantial mansion. Alas! perforce she turned her eyes inward, afterwards, upon her own miserable, cheerless plight.

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

Thus the house-keeper, returning, found her—moist-eyed and sad of face.

“There has not been a young lady like you in this house since the death of its last mistress, many years gone,” said the house-keeper. “The sweetest woman that ever was—scarce more than a girl, like you, and, begging your pardon, so pretty, like yourself. You put her in my mind again strongly, though I have often thought that the charm she brought with her on her wedding-day has never quite passed from the old place. Her name was Editha, and you favor her very much in all ways, except that her hair was the blackest I ever saw. Ah! her sweet face was such as God often gives to those He loves too well to spare from heaven any length of time.”

“Editha—what a pretty name!” Laura said; “how sweet she must have been!”

“Well, good-night, miss. Lock the door, miss, lest the servants come in the morning, not suspicing that any one’s here. Good-night again, miss. Pleasant dreams to you. A good night’s sleep will make you fitter for the morrow.”

Laura turned the key in the door, and fell upon her knees to pray. As she poured out the pent-up misery that flooded her heart, it seemed as though she, who had prayed every night and morn-

## 'TWIXT NIGHT AND MORNING

ing since her babyhood, had never known what prayer was—its balm, its helpfulness, the unutterable comfort, which are denied to none who, like her, tread the sharp flints of adversity, yet in utter trustfulness put out a hand to the Infinite and ask to be led like children, with all the faith of such. What seemed to her the benefaction of Heaven was poured out upon her with such effect that her nature could not endure the sudden transition from misery to peace, and she broke her prayer with sobbing.

She prepared for bed, stumbling out of her clothing and about the room in the confusion of her mind. At last she had turned out the lamp and was at rest. She had forgotten to pull down the window-shade beyond the foot of the bed, and as she lay wide awake she noticed that a brilliant star shone directly before her in the sky. A beam from it—a ray, a glint of its light—shot straight from the star to her eyes. When she looked steadily it broke and wavered, but otherwise it was firm and constant, like a pathway of light from one planet to another.

Editha was at her side, over her, about her, enveloping her, insisting that her soothing influence should nestle like peace itself upon the troubled girlish mind. Laura felt the gentle yet intense

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

domination, and allowed herself to slip in the arms of the Etherian out upon the vacancy of untroubled sleep. But the spirit was too ardent, too strong in the expression of her delight at finding her charge under the roof that should have been her home. Editha imparted to her influence too great a share of her joy. And so the fair girl, after an hour of blissful unconsciousness, tossed to one side and the other, and then awoke again, unable to support the pleasure which had filled her sleep.

Again she saw the star and its gleaming shaft of light.

“It is not mother who comes to me,” she thought; “dear mother was not like this—so soft and caressing. I never knew her to enfold me and kiss me and press me to herself as this dear companion does who comes to me at night. Do I do wrong to make the comparison? No, dearest mother; it is that I love you for your strength and calmness, and for a love more vigorous and sure than this new love I feel. Yours was like a rock to me, as steadfast, dear mother, as any love that a girl was ever blessed with. This is so different. It is not mother-love; it is—it is—”

She looked at the bright beam in the sky, and wondered if some stellar influence was upon her;

## 'TWIXT NIGHT AND MORNING

if that ray of the star's light, coming millions of miles through space, could be a pathway for a spirit from some other planet, a spirit that loved her and sought her only at night, when the stars and the earth may commune. The poetic idea did not satisfy her, and she turned from it. Editha was counselling her not to delude herself.

"No," Laura thought; "that star's light is cold and severe. The light of my dream-life is not hard and chill, like that. It is ardent—oh, so warm and vital and softly caressing! I feel it now, suffusing me, bathing me like sunshine, pouring over me in grateful waves. My angel, who are you? Won't you make yourself known to me, and stay with me always? I am so wretched without you—so happy and brave when you are with me!"

In almost an ecstasy she felt the love of the Etherian envelop her and touch her forehead and cheeks. She felt her whole self warm under the suggestion of an embrace which took her all within its influence.

"You are no chilly star," she said. "Oh, stay while I sleep and dream your dear thoughts!"

And it seemed to her that through her whole being, rather than in her mere ears, a soft voice spoke to her soul.

"I love you," it seemed to say.

## CHAPTER VI

### LAURA AT THE CLOCK HOUSE

It had been the house-keeper's intention to catechise Laura in the morning, in a kindly way, to get her explanation of how it came that a gently nurtured girl, apparently a complete stranger to the world's ways and wiles, was blown about the common road like the pollen of a wild flower. But the morning found Colonel Lamont startlingly weak, and with a cough which several times all but strangled him. Alarm took possession of the household; the doctors were sent for, and came and went—medicaments had to be prepared—even the clergyman and the local lawyer found the day monopolized by the fear of the immediate dissolution of their friend and client. But the ordinary routine of the household was carried on by the servants, who performed their duties mechanically, so that a fire was made in Laura's chamber, to which, in due course, her breakfast was fetched. The house-keeper came late in the forenoon to explain that unlooked-for circumstances made it

## LAURA AT THE CLOCK HOUSE

impossible for her to say when she could snatch a few moments for a quiet chat, but that she very much desired Laura to stay.

The unhappy girl felt her position keenly. She realized that she was an object of pity, if not of downright charity, and that there was something surreptitious about the way this was manifested—by servants, too, instead of by the family. But not knowing how or where to turn, she tried to soothe herself by the reflection that it was one of the gentlemen of the house who brought her there, and that there was some serious illness in the place to derange the accustomed order of things.

She spent the time between breakfast and luncheon in reading in some books that were in the room. Shortly after luncheon she was able to congratulate herself upon having accepted the invitation to remain, because Jack Lamont came to her and made her heartily welcome. Of course she never doubted his right to do so.

The young man had not been dispossessed of his key to the front door of the house, and with this he let himself in. Inquiring of one of the maids in which room the young lady had been lodged, he visited her, and, after a little hidden fencing with questions, discovered that she did not know his standing—or absence of standing—in the

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

house, and that nothing to his disadvantage had been told her. He deceived her with the hearty welcome he gave her and the promises he made that she should be taken very soon to New York to look up her friends. She replied that a worse misfortune than all had now befallen her; that in looking through her few effects in her hand-basket she had discovered that the letters of her mother's lawyer, which she had collected and carried away from prying eyes where she had been living, had been stolen. She said she had only opened two or three of the letters, and had not charged her mind with the lawyer's name or office address. Do her best, she could only remember the word "Broadway" on the letter-paper.

Jack made light of this. He said that he knew Broadway very well, and that the lawyers' offices upon it were confined to two or three blocks of that thoroughfare, so that it would be very easy for her to look at the names in the doorways of a very small neighborhood when he should take her there, and, without doubt, the right name would be quickly recognized by her. She was far less hopeful, but he refused to listen to her doubts, saying that if she did not find the lawyer in that way, he or she would run down to the institution in which her mother was being cared for, in the hope

## LAURA AT THE CLOCK HOUSE

that the officials or Mrs. Balm herself would be able to recall the name.

During this period, when his mother's ambitious influence (lasting from the previous night) was strong upon him, he ceaselessly planned to undo the misfortune which had befallen him, and now he was in these forbidden precincts, striving to win the good-will of Laura, in order to lead her, without arousing suspicion on her part, to assist him in the commission of a crime. Believing that his uncle would not outlast the day, he meant to open the old gentleman's safe and steal his will, which he reasoned must be in the safe, where the old man always guarded his valuable treasures and a small sum of money needed for minor expenses. He could not open the strong-box without considerable danger to himself, but this would be greatly lessened if he could induce Laura to assist him. The safe was in the Colonel's own room—a chamber between that which Laura occupied and the one to which the Colonel had been removed for greater quiet when his illness was seen to be dangerous. The middle room was therefore untenanted, and the safe in one corner could easily be opened if he could get the key, which the old gentleman kept beside his watch and purse on a small table near his bed.

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

Young Lamont left Laura and went to an unoccupied room, whose doorway commanded a view of the invalid's bed-chamber. He had known the old mansion from infancy, and could have gone blindfolded straight to any picture on any of its walls. When he was certain that his uncle had been left alone and was asleep, he recrossed the hall to Laura's room, and asked her, in a manner completely frank and off-hand, if she would please step into the old gentleman's room and fetch him a short, thick steel key which she would find on the table by the bed's head.

"You are light of foot, and can get it for me without disturbing uncle," he said. "I am so clumsy that I should probably knock over a chair or two before I got in and out again."

"I will get it for you with pleasure," Laura said, "if you will show me which is the room."

Lamont led her through the central chamber, so that it should not be necessary for either of them to go into the hallway, and, pointing to a door before them, whispered: "That leads into the room. Be still as a mouse, so as not to wake my poor uncle. I will return for the key in a moment."

Realizing the risk she ran, he took himself to his vantage-point across the hall, in order not to

## LAURA AT THE CLOCK HOUSE

figure in the discovery if she should be caught. He had little more than reached his hiding-place when he had reason to congratulate himself upon this exercise of his cunning.

He saw the house-keeper enter the sick man's chamber.

Laura had noiselessly opened the door and had gone softly to the table, where she found the key. Then she turned and tiptoed back again, glad indeed to be of service where she was meeting with such disinterested kindness. As she came back to within a step or two of the door to the central room, the house-keeper entered the sick man's apartment by the hall-door. She saw Laura balancing on the point of one foot, and with the key of the safe hanging upon a finger of her half-upraised left hand.

"Why! You? Oh-h-h!" the house-keeper exclaimed, in what was meant to be a whisper, but proved loud enough to awaken the light sleeper near by.

Laura gave her a kindly smile, but the house-keeper was in no mood to appreciate the guilelessness from which it sprung. She grasped the key, and then Laura's arm, and was about to push her out, when the Colonel opened his eyes wide and saw both the women. His eyes distended, and such a

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

gleam came into them that both Laura and Miss Johnson were startled.

“My God! it’s Helen!” the old man exclaimed.

The house-keeper opened the door and pushed Laura into the next room. But before she closed the door the Colonel cried out:

“Helen! Sister, come back!” He had recognized in Laura the amazing likeness she bore to her mother at the time Mrs. Balm left her home to be married.

“Oh, this will be the death of him!” Miss Johnson muttered. “He is delirious.” Then she turned to Laura. “You stay here. Do not try to go away.”

She walked quickly back to the old man’s bedside and endeavored to quiet him.

“My sister Helen,” the old man said; “she has come at last. How long has she been here? Why did you hurry her out of the room?”

“That was not any one you know,” said the house-keeper. “Please be calm, sir. Think a minute; you have no sister, you know.”

“Don’t try to make a fool of me,” said the Colonel. “Does she not want me to see her? Bring her back. Tell her everything is forgotten, and I am glad she has—”

“I am not deceiving you, sir. I did not know you had a sister.”

## LAURA AT THE CLOCK HOUSE

“I have not seen her since she left here twenty years ago,” said the Colonel; “but I know that was she. I want her. Why do you send her away?”

“Please be calm, sir,” said the house-keeper. “That girl is not twenty years old herself. She is a poor thing we gave shelter to last night out of charity. You forget how weak you are, sir. You may have been thinking of your sister. There, now, try to go to sleep, sir. The doctor insisted you should sleep, sir. I am sorry you were disturbed.”

“That’s true. Helen would be forty now—over forty,” said the Colonel. “Thinking of her? I have been doing so constantly; but that has nothing to do with it. I tell you that was Helen’s very image. Send Tappin to me. He knows Helen. Send him here at once.”

“Yes, sir,” said Miss Johnson.

She left the room and returned to Laura.

## CHAPTER VII

### UNDER HIDEOUS SUSPICION

“Oh, how could you—how could you?” the house-keeper exclaimed, as she rejoined Laura. Her tone was one in which sorrow bore equal part with surprise.

“I’m very sorry I woke the poor gentleman,” Laura said, wholly innocent even of the fault with which she thus generously connected herself. “I tried hard to be very quiet, but you were so startled. I’m very, very sorry.”

“But this key — what were you doing with this?”

“Mr. Lamont — the young gentleman who brought me here—he asked me to go in and get it, because he thought I could do so more quietly than he.”

“Oho!” exclaimed the house-keeper; “Mr. Lamont asked you? And where is he now?”

“He is in the next room — the one where I slept.”

Miss Johnson led the way, and both entered

## UNDER HIDEOUS SUSPICION

Laura's room, but of course not to find Lamont there.

"He said he would be—no, he said if he was not here he would return in a moment."

"I shall see about this," the house-keeper said. "If what you say is true, you will not endeavor to leave here until I come back."

"Oh, madam," Laura exclaimed, "do not doubt me! I would not tell an untruth—believe me, nothing could make me do so. He will be here in an instant, and he will tell you just exactly what I have said. Why do you look at me so strangely? If I did tell untruths, I could not tell them to you, who have been so good to me; but I do not. Mr. Lamont will tell you that he came a few minutes ago, for the second time this morning, and asked me to get him the key, because he was afraid he would wake his uncle. I was so glad to have a chance to oblige him."

"I will find him—if he is in the house," said Miss Johnson.

She left Laura, astonished at her bearing in the face of what seemed positive guilt, and having sent the butler to his master's bedside, found Mr. Borrowes in the dining-room, occupied with a newspaper and a cigar. To him she recounted the news of the daring attempt at robbery which she

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

had frustrated, dwelling with emphasis, however, on the apparent innocence and frankness of the girl.

“Ah! that’s very fine,” the lawyer said, “but it looks confoundedly like acting. A girl taken in off the road about whom nothing can be known except by what she says and does. And she does what?—watches for a moment when no one is with the Colonel, and creeps in and gets the key of his safe. Are you sure she hasn’t got his pocket-book also, or the money out of it, and his watch and chain? No; but you should have looked. Better go at once, and see what else she has taken. But, as I was saying, when she is caught, she is all smoothness and innocence and protestations of virtue. Bah! it sounds confoundedly like play-acting. Your sex, my good woman, provides more and better actresses off the stage than ever adopt it for a profession. Run up at once and see what else is missing, while I inquire whether young Mr. Lamont has been in the house; though of course he cannot have been.”

“Such a desperate bold thing, though, sir—attempting to rob a safe! Who ever heard of a girl safe-robber? And she’s so young and so very innocent like.”

“I’ll admit it is almost incredible, but you

## UNDER HIDEOUS SUSPICION

caught her at it," said the lawyer. "And her story? Why, we know that the young gentleman cannot have been in the house."

Hardly had the house-keeper had time to reach the Colonel's room when Jack Lamont sauntered into the dining-room with a bold assumption of nonchalance, and bade Mr. Borrowes good-morning.

The lawyer asked him sharply how he came there. He replied that he let himself in with his own key, and asked who had a better right. He added that he was about to go to his home in the city, and as he had left some things in the house, he came, on a last visit, to take them away. Besides, he had also wanted to see Mr. Borrowes, and being told at the gate that he was not to be admitted any more, he had taken the liberty to vault over the wall and admit himself. He wanted to know definitely, he said, whether his uncle intended to leave him an annuity, or a present, or nothing at all.

"Well, sir," said the lawyer, "I tried to make your position clear to you yesterday. If I failed, then there is nothing for me to do but to put your case in your uncle's exact words: you will get nothing, he told me, if you leave this neighborhood. If you remain, you may get a term in prison. He charged me to say this to you, and I think it

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

reveals his state of mind towards you with reasonable distinctness."

"Umph!" said young Mr. Lamont. "He's a damned old pig at the best, but he will hardly make himself publicly ridiculous by arresting me for visiting him, my uncle, to look after my own interests. And you may yet feel very sorry for parroting his brutalities to me, Mr. Borrowes, for I have not yet given up the hope of coming into this property."

The old lawyer smiled by way of an answer to this threat.

"You came," said he, "to get some things of yours—eh? Ah! here is Miss Johnson now. I want you to hear me, miss. The thing of yours that you came to get, sir. What was it? The key of your uncle's safe—eh?"

"I do not understand you," Lamont said; "but I warn you to measure your words. You call yourself a lawyer. You should know how to avoid language that is actionable, and you had better be careful."

"Another thing of yours that you came to get, sir, was a young woman whom you brought to the lodge last night—eh?"

"That is true. I came to see her, for one reason. I mean to see her before I leave."



.. 'IF YOU REMAIN, YOU MAY GET A TERM IN PRISON ' "



## UNDER HIDEOUS SUSPICION

“ You have seen her already, within an hour.”

“ You lie,” said Lamont, perfectly calmly.

“ She has been caught, sir, leaving your uncle’s room with the key of his safe. Did she take anything else, miss ?”

“ No, sir, not that I can discover.”

“ She is a bad one, I must say,” said Lamont.

“ Wait one minute,” said the lawyer. “ Caught with the key of the safe, as I say, and when caught she said that you had asked her to get it and bring it to you, sir. Now what have you to say to that ?”

“ Not much,” said Lamont. “ I am not responsible for what a girl like that does or says. I will say, though, that I had no idea she was a thief, though I knew she was a vagabond—a devilish pretty one, which is why I bothered myself to get her a bed until I had a chance to see something more of her.”

“ You have not seen her to-day ?”

“ I have not,” said Lamont.

“ You did not at any time, or in any way, lead her to get the key with which she was found ?”

“ Never. I have but just come in the house,” said Lamont. “ You say she said she was to bring the key to me. Ask her where she was to find me—if you want to satisfy yourself of what she is. The whole story is preposterous. I ask no

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

odds of you, or any one in this house, but I will leave it to you whether you have not had sport enough with me in trying to do me out of my rights, in ordering me out of this house, in making idle threats, and calling me ugly names—in all those ways—without insulting me with such a grave charge as this on the bare word of a tramp girl, whom I took from the company of rowdies on the road, and whom some of you here—not I—brought into the house. I am not a thief, sir, and you take a mean advantage of your age when you dare to hint that I am.”

Never did virtue speak with deeper feeling than rang through Lamont’s voice as he thus acted the part of outraged innocence.

“I have never hinted that I believed the girl,” said Mr. Borrowes. “What is more, I do not believe her. She was caught red-handed, and made herself out to be your confederate. She has not character enough of her own to damage that of any one else, but I repeat what she said in order, as I feel obliged to do, to arrive at the facts.”

“I believe every word the young lady says,” said the house-keeper, excitedly. “I’ve seen her, sir, and spoken with her, and you haven’t. No one need tell me she is a bad girl. I’ll stake everything I’ll ever own that she’s not. She is being

## UNDER HIDEOUS SUSPICION

cruelly slandered ; that's my opinion. But if you believe the young gentleman, sir, what does it matter what I think ? What is to be done with her, sir ?"

" Let her go. We cannot spare the time to punish her. Tell her to be gone at once, and to thank her stars that the dread of death in the house helps her to escape. See that the servants do not get wind of all this, else it may reach the old gentleman's ears."

It was one of the maids who bore to Laura the peculiar message that she was at liberty to leave the house, and that "she had better go at once." The sensitive house-keeper, when sending the message, acknowledged to herself that she had not the heart to deliver it personally.

" I had better go ?" Laura repeated. " You were told to say that to me ? How very strange ! But I cannot go in this way without—without a good-bye, or a chance to— I must thank the gentleman who brought me here."

" If it's Mr. Lamont you mean," said the servant-girl, " he's not in the house no more."

" The woman in charge, then. Say that I ask to see her, to take my leave."

" 'Twas herself that sint me to say you had better go."

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“Is she—did she say—but I do not want to question you,” said Laura, with dignity. “Go and tell her I will be obliged if she will see me for a moment.”

“She’s terrible busy, mum.”

“Please deliver my message to her,” Laura said. “She cannot mean me to go away like—like—this. Tell her that I cannot go without seeing her.”

The maid went away, and presently Miss Johnson came, wearing on her wholesome face an expression which wavered between the sternness necessitated by one view of Laura’s conduct, and the gentle pity begotten of another view.

“What is it you want, miss? I am very busy just now.”

“You are displeased with me. I am so sorry,” Laura said. “Is the poor sick gentleman angry? Is he made worse by what I did? I cannot leave without saying to you that I’m sorry—that if you had not come in at that moment, I should have gone out of the room without disturbing him.”

“It’s all done and gone now, miss,” said the house-keeper. “It was not you that woke him; it was I who did that. But—but—”

“Have I done something else to give offence?” Laura asked, plaintively. “I seem doomed to

## UNDER HIDEOUS SUSPICION

such cruel misfortunes. Oh, do not turn me away from here without a kind word! I have all the misery I can stand without the shame of offending friends who have been kind to me."

"There, there," said Miss Johnson, all her doubt and stiffness vanishing; "there has been a misunderstanding, but it's all right now. We are dreadfully upset here, miss, and all the trouble has come from my keeping you here under the circumstances. Now you really must go. No, you need not thank me; but you can call me your friend, for I am that, and I never will doubt you or believe ill of you."

"Oh, what a load you take from me!" Laura exclaimed, putting out her hand to grasp one of Miss Johnson's.

"Though you must leave here, miss," said the house-keeper, "please do not go far for a few hours. Go to the hotel, to the cook there, where Mr. Lamont found you. Just stay there a couple of hours, and if you don't hear from me, think no more of it; but there may be something that I will want to tell you and that you'd like to hear."

When she had seen Laura, with her basket, out of the front door, Miss Johnson returned to the

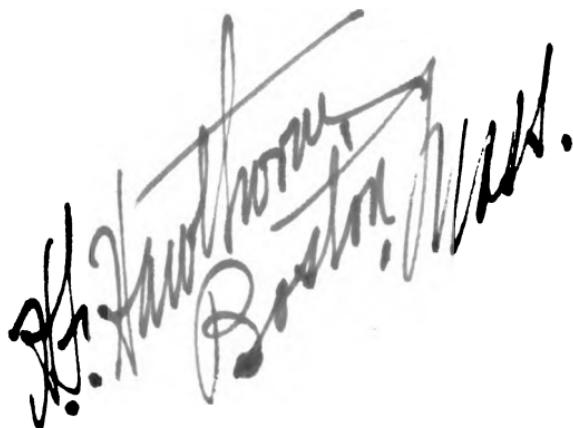
## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

room in which they had been talking, and closing the door, clinched her fists, and, tightening her lips, muttered something very like an oath that she would satisfy herself of Laura's goodness, and go to her and clear her own mind of all that had been torturing it. For she felt in her heart that in the matter of the attempted robbery there was in Laura's favor the upright, frank behavior of what seemed a noble nature, while against her was the word of an unprincipled man who, as likely as not, had plotted the circumstances which gave weight to his accusation.

After very little questioning of the under-servants, the house-keeper learned that Lamont had been seen to enter the house fully an hour before the sensational visit of Laura to the Colonel's room, and that he had spent that time up-stairs on the same floor with Laura and the invalid. Thus she satisfied herself that he was a liar upon one count at least. But Laura, who did not even suspect that her honor was questioned, could have got no consolation from the discovery. If there was any flavor of good in this miserable ending of the wanderer's visit to the house of her ancestors, it lay in the fact that she was ignorant of the worst that had befallen her. The full disappointment would seem to have fallen upon the Etheri-

## UNDER HIDEOUS SUSPICION

ans, but we shall see that their supernatural powers kept them too much engrossed with shaping future events to allow present grief to weigh heavily against the good in store.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Nathaniel Hawthorne Boston Mass." The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Nathaniel" and "Hawthorne" being the most prominent parts. "Boston" is written below "Hawthorne", and "Mass." is written to the right of "Boston". There are some additional, less distinct strokes and dots to the left of "Nathaniel" and above "Mass.".

## CHAPTER VIII

### A FRIEND HELPS TO SPIN THE WEB

LAURA at last began to bear upon her face the imprints of what she had suffered. Envious they were from more than one stand-point, for they were the first strong indications of character. One could say that she had grown five years older in three days, but even now she did not look her age, because the growth had been upon a former childishness which had not been consistent with her years. Her eyes had been beautiful only with the beauty of a fawn's eyes, which reflect nothing of the soul. Her face had been pretty only with the charm of an unwritten page. But now character was at work, tracing a faint line here and new-shaping an infantile roundness there, to bring her nearer what she was — a young woman of seventeen and slightly more. She was the better looking for this outcropping of what was in her, because her soul, which was disclosing itself, was better worthy of admiration than her vacant juvenility had been.

## A FRIEND HELPS TO SPIN THE WEB

The very temper she was in, when she came out upon the road again, was strong enough to print faint outlines of its shadow on her face, and she had undergone many such trials within a few days. Now she walked boldly towards the town, past increasing numbers of people, whom she noted no more than if they had not been, though every villager turned to look again at her. Her expression was fixed, so that one saw a squareness about her chin which had not before been noticeable. Her eyes were no longer miniature sky-reflecting pools. They held a suggestion of wildness framed in a frown. She moved with some haste, but more of firmness, so that an impudent butcher-boy with his basket got out of her way as if she had been a man.

“Oh,” she muttered, like a latter-day Job, “how much must I go through? How long can this keep on? What would I not give to know how to turn —or what to do? If I could only get to New York and find those lawyers, how happy I should be!”

Another quarter of a mile she walked, and then she spoke again, almost aloud :

“I shall beg. I never imagined I could think of it, but I shall ask some one for money, so as not to be so helpless — just for a day, to hold up my

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

head and look around. Surely, surely, I was not born to undergo this. It does not seem that I can stand it."

She came to the hotel, but found herself unable to go in as she had promised. She passed on, and strode on into the open country, over which the shadows were slanting lengthily.

Tappin had been with the old Colonel for nearly an hour, endeavoring to convince him that the girlish wastrel who had drifted into the house could not by any possibility be his middle-aged sister, who went away older than this young lady twenty years before.

"Then she died when she left here, and this was her ghost," said the obstinate invalid. "You knew my sister Helen—Mrs. Balm she became—and if you had seen her as I did in this room this afternoon, you would understand why I am not to be argued into doubting my plain eyesight. I won't have it, Tappin; by the Eternal, I won't be faced down about it. Put on your hat and overcoat and go and find her. She can't have gone far. Perhaps you had better take the wagon. See her for yourself, and then come and tell me whether she's Helen's spirit or what."

"I'll find her, sir," said Tappin. "I am as curious as yourself, particularly, if you'll excuse me

## A FRIEND HELPS TO SPIN THE WEB

saying it, because you've not a particle of fever, and you seem quite yourself."

On the main street of Powellton he encountered old Christmas, who called from across the road, and hobbled over to him.

"You may have to wait a bit for her at the hotel," said he. "She wasn't going in, but she'll have to come back to it. I have a sure feeling she will, at least by the time you've been there a few minutes."

"Who are you talking about?" Tappin asked him.

"The young fly in the web," Christmas said. "The same one you had at your house last night. Oh, I know other folks's business—that's all the good I am. I didn't stop her, because I couldn't see my way to help her, though she was near crazy with her troubles."

"What do you know about her? Who is she?"

"A fly in a web, sir. 'Pon my word she's nothing else; just a poor little fly, so lonely and helpless and young and good, and yet all tangled up in misfortunes."

"You know more than you'll tell, you old busy-body," said Tappin; "but I'll soon find out the little I'm after."

Tappin went on to the kitchen of the Powellton

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

Hotel, and there was Laura, her mind at less tension, and her body tired. He had walked to the centre of the room when, hearing his steps, she turned and faced him. He could not control himself against the shock which the sight of her gave him.

“My God!” he muttered. “No wonder he sent me!”

“Good-morning, Mr. Tappin,” said the cook. “What’s wrong with you, sir, wandering into my kitchen—into which everybody else has taken to walking, free like, so why shouldn’t you?”

“This young lady,” the butler said, “was she—I beg your pardon, miss, would you mind saying where you was last night and most of to-day?”

“I stopped at a Mr. Lamont’s—the house in the large grounds above the town.”

“Right; it is you I’m looking for. Would you mind telling me who I’m addressing, miss?”

“My name is Laura Balm.”

“Your mother’s maiden name—will you tell me that, please?”

“I do not know it. It may seem strange,” Laura said, “but she never told it to me. She always seemed to try to forget her early life. I think it was because she had only a brother in all

## A FRIEND HELPS TO SPIN THE WEB

the world, and they quarrelled. She seldom spoke even of him, and then only vaguely."

"Surely you know what her first name was?"

"Why do you speak so of her?" Laura asked, fearful of evil news. "Have you come from—where she is? Has anything dreadful happened?"

"No, I know nothing about her. Then she is alive, is she, miss?" Tappin asked.

"Oh yes, mother is alive; but she is very ill. I was afraid you had come from her. You asked her given name; it is Helen."

"Ma'am," said Tappin to the cook, "just leave me with this young lady for a few moments, there's a good woman. I want to speak with her, private, you know."

The shrewd old servant, born and bred to listen and not to speak, led Laura to talk of herself for half an hour, while he volunteered nothing except that "the folks up at the house had taken an interest in her." He did do a little violence to his training by hinting that his employers might aid her in seeking her relatives; though, he said, this depended on many things, the household being so upset by the illness of the Colonel, which was why she had been asked to leave the place sooner than was intended. He quizzed her to good purpose. Her resemblance to her mother convinced him that

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

she was as she described herself ; but her hardest task, of which she was as oblivious as of all that was being imposed upon her, was to assure him of her good character. He had heard that she had been wayfaring with loafers through the country, and he was cognizant of the episode of the safe-key at the Clock House. Very shrewdly, without in any way betraying his suspicions, he induced her to defend her character. As she had nothing to conceal, her whole story was easily drawn from her. He was soon satisfied that she was a pure girl, and that her brief experience with Heintz had left no stain upon her. Her account of the manner in which she came to visit the Colonel's bedside was so frankly and innocently narrated as to make it evident that she thought only of the opportunity it gave her to render a slight service in return for the kindness of the gentleman who requested it. What she emphasized was her regret that the house-keeper had happened to come upon her in the room, and been startled into arousing the invalid from his sleep.

In recalling the very little she knew of her mother's earlier life with her brother, she startled the butler more than once.

“ Mother told me,” she said, “ that a portrait of herself, at just about my own age, is framed in the

## A FRIEND HELPS TO SPIN THE WEB

oaken panelling of a beautiful room in her old home. Opposite is the picture of her brother, and on the other walls are paintings of her mother and father."

Tappin knew that Mrs. Balm's portrait and the others had once occupied this exact relationship in the dining-room at the Clock House, but he kept his knowledge to himself.

"Go on, please," he urged; "try to think of something else she told you."

"Well, once when I asked mother how she came by a deep little scar on her forehead, just beneath her hair, she said that in a great garden behind her old home there were two iron statues, one of a little boy standing beside a goat, and the other of a little girl beside a lamb. Once she was romping at a game of tag around the statue of the boy and goat, and the whole statue, pedestal and all, fell over and nearly killed her. She was ill in bed for weeks. When her mind gave way recently the doctors said it might have been because of the wound she had got at that time."

"Yes, miss," and "how awful, miss!" was all that Tappin said, though he remembered the incident clearly, for he had been a boy on the place at the time, and had helped to carry the little girl into the house when she lay stunned beneath the fallen statue. He was very proud of his self-con-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

trol as he listened, to all appearances unmoved, for he really wanted to grasp Laura's hand and bid her welcome to a beautiful home of which she was in ignorance. But a lifetime habit controlled, and a servant's limitations beset him.

When he took his leave of Laura he merely said, "I wish you would stay right here, miss, until you get a message or some one is sent to you."

Out in the open air he felt like shouting. Never had he performed such important service as this. Of all the servants at the Clock House, he alone had known Mrs. Balm. He alone could say positively that the old Colonel's insistence that Laura was like her was entirely reasonable and well founded. And now he had what he considered the most positive proof that the girl was Mrs. Balm's daughter; yes, more, an instinctive assurance that she was a good girl, who would bring credit to any family, even that of the Lamonts. He felt his importance as if it might lift him off the ground, and yet he presently flung it all to the winds by the very reverse of the course he had maintained in his interview with Laura.

This was when he met young Lamont loafing about Powellton. Tappin meant, when he caught sight of the man approaching him, only to salute him and pass on, but Jack stopped him, saying,

## A FRIEND HELPS TO SPIN THE WEB

“Well, Tappin, have you got rid of that girl tramp up at the house?”

This was more than even the sage Tappin felt called upon to pass over in silence. “If it’s your cousin you refer to, Mr. Lamont, we have not got rid of her.”

“My cousin? What’s the matter with you, Tappin? I have no girl cousin. I mean that girl there was such a fuss about at the house this morning.”

“So do I mean the same one, sir,” said Tappin. “Miss Balm, daughter of the Colonel’s sister. I have just left her at the hotel, sir, after satisfying myself that she is what I say; though, for the matter of that, sir, it was the Colonel who suspected it first, from a mere glance he got at her face. So, Mr. Lamont, she’s not got rid of—for all that you call her a tramp, and worse; it’s my opinion she’ll not be got rid of, either, in many a long year.”

“The devil you say! Is this true? Well—damn it—old fellow, how could I know who she was, or that she wasn’t like any other fly-by-night one meets? Well, well, well; this—is—a surprise.”

“The Colonel would have her back even when he’d only his suspicions,” said Tappin, “so that

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

you may be sure she'll be warmly welcomed now that them suspicions proves true. I can say that to you and no harm done, though I did not say it to her. I merely asked her to wait at the hotel, saying, I says, that maybe she'd have a message, or, says I, somebody would come and take her back to the house."

"You always were as shrewd as they make 'em," said Jack, craftily. "Stop a moment. Take a cigar. Light up and smoke it now, I sha'n't mind. I'll walk a little way with you."

"I'll enjoy it some other time," said Tappin, pocketing the cigar. "Really, I must hurry, for the Colonel is wild to hear the news. And, to tell the truth, I'm crazy to be telling it to him."

"I don't wonder at it—not a little bit," Lamont said. "That's right, hurry along, and I'll keep up with you a little way. Wonder at it? No, indeed. It's the most surprising thing that's happened in the family in my time. I'll bet the young lady was surprised when she heard the facts—one of the heirs to a fortune, and the owner on his death-bed."

"She will be surprised, poor young lady," said Tappin; "but I didn't tell her. Not a thing did I tell her. It was she who told me all I wanted—her whole history, even down to little things that

## A FRIEND HELPS TO SPIN THE WEB

happened her mother before she was born ; things I was a witness of myself." And here the silly old servant repeated parts of several revelations of Laura's that went to prove her the daughter of Helen Lamont.

"And you never told her what you were questioning her for, or what she proved herself to be?"

"I never gave her a glimpse of a shadow of an idea of what it was all about," said Tappin. "I just remarked that the folks wanted, says I, to know something about her, and perhaps, I says, they'd help her to find her people. What right had I to pass my own judgment or to be making promises to be carried out by the folks I work for?"

"Oh, but you never lose your wits, do you?" Lamont said. "You never are caught napping, are you?"

"Well, I never thought myself so very wise," said the butler, whose vanity was swelling like a turkey's feathers. "But I must hurry along, sir, if you'll excuse me."

"Don't let me keep you," said Lamont. "Good-bye. You'll make a great sensation at the old house."

It was a great sensation indeed. Tappin report-

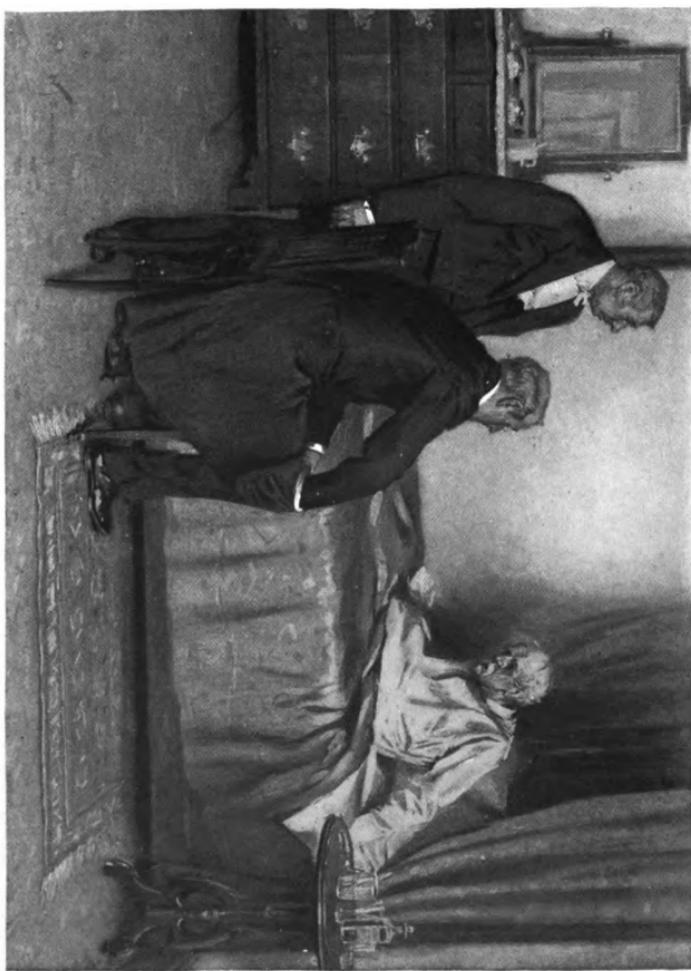
## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

ed faithfully to the old Colonel all that he had seen and heard, and the impressions these discoveries had made upon him, in confirmation of his master's instinctive feeling of Laura's kinship. The effect upon the Colonel was magical. He sat up in bed, and, with a stronger light in his eyes and a stouter voice than it had been thought he could summon, he cross-questioned his old servant, commented on the news, and philosophized about the change in the family fortunes which the finding of the girl would bring about. The apparent new flow of strength and enthusiasm proved to be the final outputtings of his energy.

"I shall leave you all directly," he said to Mr. Borrowes. "This is all I have waited for. I have dreamed of my sister for several nights, and have felt that she—or some one near her—was coming." He spoke in broken sentences, like a man whose breath eluded him. "I've waited very long—very long—and patiently, Borrowes. I'm glad—now—that I can soon go."

"Nonsense, my dear sir," said the lawyer. "You have slept well, and are distinctly mending. Let's have no such talk. Old fellows like us are knotty, and hard to cut down. You've been fighting against odds. They've had you with your back to the wall, but now you've as good as won.

“HE SPOKE IN BROKEN SENTENCES”





## A FRIEND HELPS TO SPIN THE WEB

Think of that old port you've got left in the cellar and the laugh we'll have at the doctor and the dominie—and the sweet girl who will cheer the house after this. All you need is quiet and rest for a few days more. Calm yourself, now; to-morrow will be time enough for us to talk over this new situation."

"I shall never see to-morrow's light," said the old man. "Don't deceive yourself. Death's close to me, and—I know it, and am not afraid. Send for my niece—quickly. Let me look at her and hear her voice. God bless her for bringing me such relief! At last Providence has given me an heir—and my harshness to Helen can be expiated. I'm tired, Borrowes—tired of going on my knees to beg some one to take my property. Send for my niece, and let me see her made mistress here to-night."

The lights were being lit and the Etherians were reassembling when the house-keeper hastened to her room to dress for the grateful task of fetching Laura back to the Clock House, back to her own roof-tree, out of the storm and stress of the most perverse circumstances that ever, within the knowledge of these new-found friends, beset a simple, innocent, and noble girl.

The Colonel slept heavily with clogged breath-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

ing, greatly weakened by the strain he had undergone ; but Tappin did not spare him.

“Colonel. Please, sir. Colonel,” he called, while he bent over the bed.

“Yes, yes, Tappin. What is it now ?”

“I’m very sorry, sir. It’s about the young lady—your niece, sir. She’s gone, sir. She’s gone to New York on the 6.10 express. Your nephew, sir, has taken her off.”

“Jack ?”

“Yes, sir.”

## CHAPTER IX

### BOTH SIDES OF A GRAVE

THE invalid dropped his head back upon the pillow and was quiet, except for his breathing, that rasped its way to and fro in his throat. After a moment, stretched to many times its actual length in the butler's anxious mind, the Colonel roused himself.

"I must be kept awake," he said, with awesome huskiness thickening the treble of his voice. "If I sleep now I'll never wake again: do you understand, Tappin? And I have too much to do. How has this—this new deviltry—been managed? What made her—how did he induce—"

"He got news of who she was, sir. And he went to her, pretending to be sent by you, and told her she was to go to New York with him to find her relatives. I'm very sorry, sir."

"*You* told him, then," said the Colonel. "He got the news from you, or Miss Johnson. Nobody else knew it, and nobody but you has been to the village. It was you who told him, Tappin."

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“I did, sir,” said Tappin. “I deserve anything for it. I met him on the road, and he spoke of her—very badly, sir; indeed he did—and I answered without thinking.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter; it’s done. You’ve been a good servant to me, Tappin—and now you’ve got your hands full to bring her back when I’m gone. It’s annoying. I wanted to see her—but what does it matter? Jack is up—to some of his deviltry—but he won’t succeed, for she’s a good girl. There was only one rascal ever born—to this family—rascal or fool—the same thing. He won’t succeed. Bring her back—when I’m gone. Promise me, Tappin. Now get Borrowes. Why can’t he stay by me—just this little while? Call him quickly, for I’m tired—tired of all this worry.”

To the lawyer, when he came, the dying man talked earnestly and clearly, though in broken phrases separated by his struggles for breath.

“It’s a race between you—and death, old friend,” said the Colonel. “And death’s got the start of you, so be quick—do be quick. And, Tappin, you keep me awake. The best way—will be to tell me—how you came to talk to Jack—about my niece. Go on; tell me, man. That will make me very angry, and keep me awake—perhaps—though I

## BOTH SIDES OF A GRAVE

fear I can't get angry as I ought to. It is too much trouble, Tappin. When I'm gone—think of what I said—that it is too much trouble to get angry; trouble for nothing.

“Leave everything to my niece, Laura Balm—do you hear, Borrowes? Sole heir, you understand. Say that if she's foully dealt with—or dies—or can't be found—then Archibald—Archibald will inherit all. Now, then, Tappin, you muddling old—old— Go on, go on. Tell me how you came to make such a fool of yourself.”

Tappin talked, and the Colonel strained at his weakening senses to keep himself awake, while the pen of the lawyer raced to and fro across the paper. At last the old man was lifted to a sitting posture, a pen was put in his hand, and he executed his signature, clearly and firmly, though almost mechanically, as men of affairs write their names after a lifetime's constant practice.

He tried to speak as he was being lowered back upon his pillow, but no words came. And in an hour he had passed life's barrier to join the spirit of his mother, leaving his worn-out body on the bed.

“What, mother! you here?” he said to her. “Why, then, it was you who kept coming to me while I was ill, and counselled me about my sis-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

ter and my niece. Of course, I know it now, but I did not understand it then. I was constantly on the verge of grasping the knowledge that it was you, and yet I kept forever slipping away from it again. You know that feeling, don't you, of having a name or a word at the tip of your tongue and then losing it? Your presence tantalized me in just that way. My! how well I do feel—but how strange, too; so light and free!"

"You don't realize that your body is dead, my son."

"Dead? I? How can I be dead? I am not even dreaming!"

"No, not dreaming," his mother said. "But look at your body there on the bed. Remember that you are speaking to me—standing face to face with me—whose body was laid aside forty years ago. Your moments are precious, for you are about to pass for a time from sight and knowledge of earthly affairs."

"How extraordinary! And I was feeling that I had recovered from that awful illness. But I see; it must be so, of course. Why, here's Editha!" the Colonel said, as the spirit of his wife appeared before him. "How glad I am to see you, dear Editha! There was not a day after you were taken from me that I did not think of you more

## BOTH SIDES OF A GRAVE

than once. No one ever took your place in my heart, Editha. And you too have been frequently with me of late. I know it perfectly now, and it seems so strange that I did not realize it at the time. It was you who made me think so constantly of yourself; you led me to dream that you were by my side—caressing and comforting me. How plausibly that knowledge did evade me! A thousand times I seemed on the point of realizing your presence, and each time the recognition slipped by and left me unsatisfied. But how good it is to see and be with you both! If this is death, it is an improvement upon—”

“ Listen, my son. You must not lose an instant,” said Mrs. Lamont. “ Only a few moments of this after-consciousness are allotted to you at this time. It is not fit that any spirit should remain while its earthly senses are fresh and keen to witness what occurs immediately after the passage from mortal life. Your new powers are not developed; your earthly ties are too newly broken. Therefore the grief, confusion, disturbances of your plans, the possible quarrels and ingratitude of relatives, are things you cannot alter or mend, and so you may not witness them. Be quick. You have already tarried long. Have you any questions to ask?”

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“I cannot adjust my mind to this so hurriedly,” he said.

“Your niece?” his mother suggested. “You would like to ask about her.”

“Yes, my niece,” he repeated, eagerly. “Will she be found, and become the mistress of the—”

Even as he spoke the two Etherians saw the ray that was his soul fade and disappear. And where he had been there remained nothing that even they could see.

“So,” said Mrs. Lamont, as calmly as if her son had merely stepped into the next room, which, perhaps, is precisely how she regarded his change of condition, “he has gone from all care and trouble, and only things too stupendous for our comprehension will concern him any more. But, Editha, you seem to me to retain a great deal of the old mortal interest in earthly things. You and Deborah both display an enthusiasm here which spirits seldom feel except where an injury or grievance, like murder or moral wounds, outlives the grave. It all seems trifling to me. I came to ease the Colonel’s sufferings and welcome him to his new state, and I have felt little interest in anything more.”

“I love Laura,” said Editha. “She is so sweet—and helpless. But you cannot say I have on-

## BOTH SIDES OF A GRAVE

thusiasm. If I had, what agony I would suffer to see her thrown out of her only home and decoyed to New York by that wicked man while I may only look on! I must let her misfortunes run their course, it sometimes seems, and may only calm and comfort her. If it were not for the philosophy that comes with everything else, I could not endure my impotence."

"Yes," said the elder Etherian; "but you should be with her now. Open her eyes to his character. She thinks him a good man and her friend. Enlighten her quickly. Do you dare to say that the power to warn and guide a helpless soul is a little gift? What you can do counts for more in the end than if you were a mortal. Look at Jack. He has her in his power. Yet he will fail, and she will triumph, through your assistance."

In the mean time the 6.10 express from Fishkill was darting over the country and through the gathering darkness with every seat taken, and with Laura Balm and Jack Lamont in opposite ends of it. It did not agree with any part of Lamont's plan to be separated from her, but, as it was, he was glad to find a seat for himself in the smoking-car, and to get her the only other place there was, in the drawing-room of a parlor-car, beside an elderly man.

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

While she had waited in the tavern kitchen for a message from the Clock House, Lamont came and told her that he had been deputed by his family to take her to New York and help her to find her father's lawyers and her people. He urged her to make haste in order to catch the stage that would meet the only fast train of that night. Doubting nothing, wholly grateful, rejoiced to find herself on the way to New York at last, she bade farewell to the agitated cook at the tavern, and entered the omnibus which was about to start for Fishkill. After it, on a baggage-wagon, Christmas followed, dubious in mind and disturbed at heart. There was just room for Laura and Lamont in the stage, but the shade of Deborah Lamont also found space there. Editha, too, made the journey also, but not with the runaways.

Deborah clung close to her son, stilling his conscience, applauding him, crying constantly to his brain: "Now manage to make her love you. Marry her—marry her—marry her. She is simple, young, trusting. Keep others away from her. Your way is paved. She is grateful. Act quickly. Marry her—marry her. Then all the Colonel's wealth is as good as yours."

Jack Lamont listened, enchanted. What voice counselled him he knew no more than any of us

## BOTH SIDES OF A GRAVE

do when two promptings besiege our consciousness, contrarily or in unison. He only knew that this second voice carried agreeable counsel. His second impulse had been to play with Laura as the toy of a season. Even when he learned who she was, he still planned to bind her to him in dis-honor, and share what he could get of her property with her disgrace. But then came the urging of this newer, second conscience: "Marry her! marry her!" Why not, indeed? Then there would be no danger or scandal, and all her fortune would be his.

Editha did not counsel her, did not caress her, never once came close to her. Deborah knew why, just as Editha divined Deborah's whisperings to Jack. Editha spent her time and counsel altogether on old Christmas, although her communications were not welcomed by him. Any mortal on-looker might have seen that they perplexed him. He would stand still to receive them. Then he would walk on, shaking his white locks and muttering. It was evident that the impulses with which she stirred his mind almost excited him to rebellion against his gentle monitor. But she came to him again and again, and repeated her injunctions until his judgment, from floundering midway between his own promptings

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

and hers, was at last dragooned over to her support.

On the platform of the sprawling railway station at Fishkill Laura was left to herself, while Lamont bought the tickets and a box of fruit and sandwiches for her. She came upon Christmas on the platform, and spoke to him cheerily, saying that at last she was on her way to New York, where she would find friends, or, at least, would be directed where to find them.

“ You call it going to New York,” said Christmas, gravely. “ I call it to the shearing. Aye, the shearing first—but, pray God, no further.”

“ Why, Christmas, what makes you talk to me like that?” Laura asked. “ It is not nice of you to treat me so, after letting me see how kind and friendly you can be. You did not talk so to me after you got to know me, when we walked to Powellton together the other day. I am so much in your debt. Let me always feel that you are my friend.”

“ I would have given an arm to help you the other day, miss,” said Christmas; “ now I would give my head and body. But heed what I say—no matter how I put it. I see too much. It ain’t good for an old man like me to see so many things. It’s muddling.”

## BOTH SIDES OF A GRAVE

“Do you see something more about me?” Laura asked, with a friendly smile to cover her amusement at his pretensions. “I am not afraid to have you tell it. It must be good, for my dreams and hopes are both coming true. Tell me what you see.”

“The same web—wherever you turn,” said Christmas, in the artificial manner and tone of his prophetic mood—“the same web, miss, still catching your feet. No, no ; stay, miss, and listen. I’m muddled ; fearful muddled, I’ll admit. But I never muddle no one else with my seeings. What I see by myself is that you are in wicked hands. God and the angels (and the fairies, miss) keep you out of harm, I say. Now here’s what the fairies say : They told me to-night, and they told me last night, that you was a-going to New York. I have even seen you there, with my own eyes, when I was looking yon. But I couldn’t see no farther. So you’ve got to go, miss. I’m sorry, indeed, but you’ve got to go.”

“Yes, yes,” said Laura, eagerly. “Then I’m right, you see, and you must be wrong. Why, I’ve prayed to get there—to find my father’s lawyer, and to be able to write to father, and to go and see my mother. Oh, Christmas, you should be glad, instead of trying to frighten me.”

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“But the web—the web!” said Christmas. “It reaches over New York. There’s nothing but the web around you, there and here and in between, tying your feet and tripping you up. I meant to warn you and to tell your friends up at the Clock House, for they are your true friends, miss, not this man here—oh no!—but the others at the house. Ah, then comes the fairies, who’ve touched your forehead and your eyes. They are at my ears now. I heed what they say, because they are your friends too. They say to old Christmas that you are to go to New York. I’m sure they’re wrong, and yet they must be right. That’s what muddles me. And when you’re muddled, miss, the best thing is to say nothing at all.”

Lamont came out of the station and approached the speakers.

“Thank you so much, Christmas,” said Laura. “Good-bye. Don’t worry about me any more.”

“Go away! Get out, you dirty beggar!” said Lamont, in a tone as heartless as his words.

“Oh, don’t speak to him like that! I shall not think you kind,” said Laura. “Here, Christmas, shake hands for good-bye.”

“Deeper and deeper in the tangle of the web,” said Christmas. “Heed me, miss, though I’m so muddled.”

## BOTH SIDES OF A GRAVE

“He has been a true friend to me,” Laura said to Lamont, as she turned away from Christmas.

“Surely you can make other friendships than with dirty tramps like that, Miss Balm,” said Jack.

“He is not dirty. I shall not hear him abused,” she retorted, with spirit. “My only hope is that whatever other friends I may have will all prove as kind and good as old Christmas.”

“Well, well,” said Lamont, “we won’t quarrel over a bunch of rags, clean or dirty. You will soon find plenty of friends in your own walk of life, I hope.”

When the train had taken up its roaring flight, Editha joined Laura in the parlor-car. This was after old Mrs. Lamont had pointed out how she could serve Laura. Now she threw about the girl her soothing interest. Her presence came to Laura as night falls upon the excitements of the day when men are busiest. It came as rest comes to the work-worn, as mother-love comes to a restless babe in its cradle. All over her consciousness—and it was as if her consciousness was a separate entity larger than herself—she felt this sudden flood of peace. She settled back and down in the upholstered seat.

“Is it you?” she murmured, softly, yet quite

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

aloud. "Have you come? How glad I am—my angel!"

At the first purring words the elderly man beside Laura looked at her with surprise. As she followed short sentence with short sentence, his surprise shifted into kindly amusement. Her eyes were closed, and he fancied her asleep and dreaming aloud. She was unconscious of everything except the presence of her comforter.

The earthly soul and the spirit were now tuned nearly in concert. The Etherian easily led the mind of Laura to turn her own thoughts into whatever channel she directed them. She could not generate new thoughts; she could only mould those that came to Laura. The space between the two intelligences was almost as nearly bridged over as it ever could be. Let us see how they got on. Knowing Laura's trust in Jack Lamont as we do, and her gratitude to him, and knowing precisely how she regarded her day's experience at the Clock House, we may judge by her thoughts precisely how the Etherian moulded her mind's operations.

"It's queer," Laura said to herself, "I had not thought of it before; in fact, I thought he was so kind. But he was very rude, and frightened me dreadfully last night on that dark road. Perhaps he meant nothing; but, no, he wasn't nice."

## BOTH SIDES OF A GRAVE

“Be on your guard,” counselled the Etherian. “Think of all you know about him. You believe he took you to the great house. But did he?”

“How strange that he should have left me with the gardener alone in that little lodge! It looks as if he did not know I was to be taken to the house; as if the house-keeper had done that. The gardener certainly told me I was to have Mr. Lamont’s room in the lodge. That looks as if he did not live in the house. But he came there. It was in the house that he— Oh, how mean it is of me to put such suspicions together! But it is all so strange. When I think about that key—how very odd all that was! He was to come back at once to get it, and he never came, though I was there half an hour; more than half an hour.”

“Did you offend by waking the sick man?” the Etherian whispered. “Think. Think.”

“Good gracious! Am I going crazy—or am I wicked—to have such ideas? I kept on saying I was sorry for waking that poor sick man, but I didn’t wake him, and the house-keeper knew I didn’t. She paid no attention to what I said about that. ‘But this key,’ she asked; ‘what were you doing with this?’ Mercy! I see everything now. When I said Mr. Lamont was in the other room, she rushed in there, and how strangely she

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

looked at me because he was not there! 'I will see if what you say is true,' she said, with such a cruel look at me. I knew she doubted me, but—oh, good heavens! can she have thought I crept into that room to steal something—to steal the key? But she found out afterwards that I told the truth. And yet, did she?—for she ordered me out of the house. And when I instantly asked for Mr. Lamont, they said he had gone. Then she could not have talked with him, after all."

"Watch. Be on your guard," whispered the Etherian.

"How fearful to harbor such thoughts!" Laura reflected. "I, who all my life was taught to think it wicked to leap to evil conclusions, and about a friend! Before, I was so grateful, and now—I cannot help it—I begin to fear him. I am afraid of him, and yet I am going with him, alone with him, to New York."

All that Editha could do was to soothe the troubled mind of her charge with the conviction that a friend was by her side to guide and admonish her. It is true that she whispered to Laura to be brave and fear nothing, to rely on her own virtue for protection; but it is more than likely that her actual ideas melted into mere solace and relief when they reached Laura's mind.

## CHAPTER X

### LAMONT'S INDUSTRIOUS VILLANY

LAURA had a double seat to herself at Tarrytown, where the elderly man got off, but Lamont came immediately and sat by her, forcing her to try to keep awake and second his efforts to maintain a conversation.

Lamont had only a slight acquaintance with good women, and may seem peculiar in this respect, but not to any man who knows the times we live in, and the men who are numerous among those who have developed club life and bachelor-flat life to their present conditions. He was simply one of the flowers of that selfish and animal contingent which makes the most use of the living and lounging quarters that are so much more complete and luxurious than any home the average young man can create for himself as to wean the more selfish ones from thought of marriage and the company of good women. In the larger cities there are coteries of men of this type, inhabiting clubs and flats which one might liken to the receiv-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

ing-vaults of great cemeteries, because in them are buried so many of the traits which self-respecting men prize most highly. To enlarge upon that subject, however, is to begin a different book from this. At all events, before Lamont's money ran out and left him desperate he had been a prize blossom of this species of exotic life. He was now capable of greater wickedness than before, but this, if he practised it, would merely be a superstructure upon the earlier foundations. When he had money he was the idol of the other vegetables in the clubs and bachelor-apartment houses.

If any of his companions had asked him why he did not marry, the chances are that he would have replied with a witticism which would be regarded as very clever in a French novel, but which should not contaminate a sheet of paper. But if he answered seriously, he would say, as he often had said, that he had not married because he never knew what to say to a good woman, and was too uncomfortable in the presence of one to pay her the smallest number of visits that would constitute a courtship. Even the most pronounced of these human weeds still think of a wife—at least, of a wife for themselves—as a good woman. They wish we had copied the customs of the Australian bush, so that they could hunt a girl with

## LAMONT'S INDUSTRIOUS VILLANY

a spear and a knife, and get her in one violent afternoon. Fancy such a man as that intent upon marrying Laura, and finding himself beside her, and she in his care !

After a few commonplaces, he spoke of his three meetings with her. To suggest the manner of his conversation, I will repeat what he said on the subject of his having noticed her in tears in an out-of-the-way country lane :

“ I couldn’t help stopping and risking a snubbing, you know, because such a pretty girl doesn’t often come in a fellow’s way. I suppose you’re used to being told how pretty you are by this time, eh ? ” Laura, in fact, was so unused to it that she blushed scarlet, and felt as uncomfortable as she was ashamed. But Lamont went on to say that now that he had met her three times, he was going to make her thorough acquaintance in the pleasantest way, and if she did not have a first-class time in New York, it would not be his fault.

“ But I don’t want a good time,” said Laura. “ I shall not impose upon your generosity for a thing more than to be taken to where my father’s lawyers have their offices.”

“ Oh, that’s all right,” said Lamont. “ That’s the main thing, of course ; but we must not bolt in upon them as if we needed them too badly.

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

That's never a good way to do with lawyers. First, you must have an address to give them, so I must put you up at a good hotel. After I have come around to enjoy a good breakfast with you, we will go to one of the great department stores, where they have stylish clothes all ready-made, and you shall pick out a pretty walking-dress and modish hat and gloves and shoes, for, you know, though you may look all right in New York, a new dress will make you feel more sure of yourself, because now you're dressed for the country, you know. No lady can have too many new dresses, can she?"

" You are very kind," said Laura ; " but—and now I hope you won't be offended at what I am going to say—I must ask you not to make any such plans for me at all. I must go somewhere to sleep, and to that extent must be a charge upon you until morning, when I shall get what I know is waiting for me and pay you back. I do not even need to put you to the trouble of going with me to the lawyers', because—well, I made my way about Paris when I was a little child, so I am sure I can find any address in New York."

" I do not doubt you can find your way about," said Lamont, " but the point is, I'm not going to let you do it. I'm in charge of you, don't you see.

## LAMONT'S INDUSTRIOUS VILLANY

My people have deputed me to take care of you until you can be united to your family. And because you have not seen New York—where I know every lamp-post and hole and corner—and because you have been unhappy, I propose that you have a real good time for a few days, and that you accept the few things to wear which will put you at your ease when we go to the theatres and swell restaurants to which I want to take you."

"No," Laura replied, earnestly—"no. Please believe me. A night's lodging is all I can accept, and even that is more than I wish to ask."

"My dear Miss Balm," Lamont persisted, "you are not reasonable, and you are not even fair to me. You have been in a heap of trouble, and now it is all over. Friends are found, and you are soon to make your whereabouts known to your relatives. You owe all this to me. I do not want to boast—wouldn't even have mentioned it, only you make me do so. But you do owe all your good luck to me. Well—wait a second—in return, I ask for the pleasure and honor of two or three days of your company in the city. Most ladies would have made me feel that what I proposed would be kindness to them, which is how I mean it. If your independence makes it different with you, please consider it kindness to me."

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“I do not want to seem ungrateful,” Laura responded, “so I hope you will not say any more about it to-night. Take me to any modest lodgings, and in the morning you will have thought it over and will see that, as I scarcely know you, and am not certain of my future, it is impossible for me to incur such obligations.”

“Are you—I don’t know how to put it, Miss Balm, but—have you any particular friend? You know what I mean?”

“I have no friends at all,” Laura replied. “I have a father, whose address I don’t know, and a mother lying dreadfully ill in a—hospital; no one else.”

“Then you are—what I mean is—you’re not engaged to be married, are you?”

“Oh!” Laura almost gasped. “The idea! How can you ask such a thing?”

“But are you? I want to know.”

“No, indeed,” said Laura, emphatically, while her face flamed. “I wish you— Oh, no one ever spoke to me of such things!”

“I spoke of it,” Lamont went on, in a very low tone, “because—and now it is your turn not to get angry, for I am very sincere—because ever since I first saw you, in tears down that lane, I have felt that we were—I mean that you were

## LAMONT'S INDUSTRIOUS VILLANY

my—that there was some magic force in you that makes me think of you all the time, keeping me awake at night, making me feverish and anxious whenever we have been separated. May I tell you, Miss Balm, what the truth is about my feelings?"

Laura replied, excitedly: "No, no! I do not want to hear it. I shall not listen, Mr. Lamont."

He continued, with skilful mockery of earnestness: "But you do not know what I'm going to say. I love you, Miss Balm. There, that is why I want to have you to myself for a few days in town. Will you not agree to my plans now that you see how much it means to me?"

The frightened girl drew away from him, pressing her body hard into the farther corner of the upholstered seat. "Oh, I wish I had not come! How can you be so wicked?"

"Wicked, Miss Balm? Since when," Lamont asked, "was it wicked to tell a girl she has inspired the most sacred feeling a man ever knows?"

"Ugh!" Laura exclaimed, as an escaping groan and a shudder came together. "You are not honest. You do not mean what you say. You are making sport of me because you see that I am ignorant, and no one has ever spoken so to me before. I have been nothing but rude to you, though

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

I have tried not to be. You have seen me once for a minute, in passing, on a country road. Afterwards you walked with me a little way in the dark, almost without speaking. After that you came and asked me to get you that key, causing me to be suspected of something horrid, and to be sent away from the house of your relatives. How can you speak of my—inspiring—having such an influence on you, when all the time I have shown you that I do not trust you—I, who have never been more than barely polite to you?"

"Miss Balm, I—"

"I do not trust you," she repeated, while her agitation grew. "I never could trust you. You are twice as old as I am, and cannot think of me in such—in that way—the way you're talking. It is wicked to keep on until I am afraid of you."

"I am sorry. Only one word more, my dear girl," said Lamont, "then I will drop the subject. I do not mean to alarm you, but neither do I deserve that you should doubt me, for I am in earnest. I love you, little girl, and cannot live without you. If I am patient and silent, do you think you could regard me differently?"

"No, no; please stop. I never could like you," said the trembling young woman.

"But if you find you have misjudged me?"

## LAMONT'S INDUSTRIOUS VILLANY

"Oh, you make me tell you; I like you much less, and am more afraid of you every time I see you," Laura said. "I never was so rude to any one but you. You frighten me, and you are just taking advantage of me by talking of such things, when I have told you no one has ever spoken so to me."

"Only let me say this, and I'll drop the subject," Lamont urged. "I love you, and want to make you my wife. I mean to do it, too—oh, with your consent, of course."

Laura stifled a groan.

"Think of what I say when you are alone tonight," continued Lamont. "You are penniless and helpless, and, as sure as there is a sky above us, you'll stay so, because you won't ever find those lawyers; or if you succeed they won't do anything for you. And I am offering you everything—home, comfort, protection, money. You'll think differently in a few days, of your prospects, and of me too, I hope."

"I may misjudge you," Laura replied, "but I shall not think of—of—the other thing—for years and years. If I do not find friends, there will be plenty in that big city for me to do to earn a living."

"Umph!" said Lamont, sneeringly. "Thou-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

sands who think like you come there every year. They find New York a monster that kills them by slow torture. Young girls are its especial prey. They arrive all hope, and soon they are glad to get in the almshouse, merely to escape the jail, or the gutters, or the fate of suicides."

"Take me to a hotel; that is all I ask."

"Have I no thanks for what I have done already?"

"I do thank you."

"But you do not respect me?"

"Let us not talk of ourselves all the time," Laura pleaded. "There, the man is calling 'New York.'"

The train was jangling across many pairs of rails to find its own track into the great station. The passengers were gathering their parcels and putting on their wraps and overcoats. Lamont bit his lip, while self-reproaches for his ill luck and a determination to gain better success on the morrow by any means, good or bad, shot through his brain. An Etherian was at his side, but another was with Laura. She determined that if Heaven only guarded her during the night she would be up and out early, before Lamont could call for her, making her way alone to the lawyers' quarter of the great city.

## CHAPTER XI

### A VIOLENT COURTSHIP

THE hotel which Lamont chose for Laura was on Broadway near Twenty-third Street. He left her in the ladies' parlor while he obtained a room for her, and presently he returned with a hall-boy, and said that he would accompany her up-stairs to see that the room was suitable.

"I'd rather you would not," Laura said, decisively. "It's sure to be good enough for a night."

"Oh, very well," said he, evidently disappointed. "Of course it will be a nice room — but I want to say a word in private."

He came near her, and bending close to her ear, whispered: "I've registered you as Miss Nevill, and your address as Albany. I'm sure you see why it is best."

"Really I do not see," Laura replied. "I am not ashamed of my name."

"I don't mean that; no, indeed. But when a young lady is travelling alone it is safest, in a large

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

city like this, for strangers not to get hold of her right name."

"Well, it doesn't matter to-night," Laura said, thinking aloud; "but when I find the lawyers I must give my address, and shall have to give my own name here. I am sure you will understand. I cannot go by a wrong name. Good-night, Mr. Lamont."

"Can you not say more than that?" he asked, affecting a sad tone and injured air.

At this Laura melted a little. She was most natural and happiest when she was kindly.

"Thank you very much for what you have done for me," said she, venturing a timid smile, and then turning to follow the boy, who stood jingling her room key farther up the hallway.

The fatigue and excitement of the day caused her to sleep late, so that nine o'clock the next morning found her in a whirl of nervous excitement, fearful that Lamont would call while she was in the hotel. She hurried into her clothing, and was quickly out upon the street, basket in hand, without a thought of breakfast. To her delight, she found herself upon Broadway, undaunted by what must have been a hopeless search, since the lawyers she sought bore names she could



**““THEY DO BE ALL DOWN THAT WAY, MUM””**



## A VIOLENT COURTSHIP

not remember. By a question put to a news-woman on the corner of Twenty-third Street, she learned which direction to take.

"There'll be none of 'em up here," the woman told her; "they do be all down that way, mum, below Canal Street."

Broadway at that time was as we remember it who knew it before the cable-cars ran there. It was in the days of Jacob Sharp's orange-hued horse-cars, that rocked along behind slipping and stumbling horses, hung with little tinkling bells. The fever and whirl, the present pandemonium, ushered in when the country awoke to the fact that it was four hundred years old, was not then upon New York. The hysteria of modern enterprise had then only broken out in Chicago. Broadway seems to us now to have been almost as somnolent as when Stuyvesant used to wake its echoes with his wooden right leg. The signs along the fronts of the miles of wholesale stores were nearly all as Jewish as if the place were Jerusalem in its heyday, but scores of big buildings, marked "to let," awaited more Jews, and further trade in buttons, fans, laces, ready-made clothing, toys, music-boxes, furs, and miscellaneous job lots for the humbler Hebrews, who sweat under packs, and regale prophetic eyes with the sight of their sons

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

riding in carriages from brownstone dwellings to marble-fronted stores.

Occasionally Laura saw a theatre, or a stock of the rubbish with which the Japanese now caricature the arts they once possessed; but, look as she might at the myriad signs which reached twenty-five feet, fifty feet, one hundred feet across the great buildings, she never saw a single huge board announcing a firm of lawyers.

Fortunately the great canyon of marble and granite led her on with its interminable vista to the southward, and she came upon the district of the dry-goods jobbing houses, haberdashers' shops, and railroad-ticket offices to spur her with the hope of greater changes to come, so that she walked on lightly, buoyed up by expectation, and stimulated by the roar and racket of the noisest place but one on earth.

“Hullo! I've been looking for you! You ran away from me, or tried to, but it is not to be, you see. Have you had your breakfast?”

It was Lamont, who had followed hot upon her heels in a horse-car, and by riding in front and scanning the crowd, had happened to find her readily.

“I did not want to be any more trouble,” Laura said, as she felt her heart sink.

## A VIOLENT COURTSHIP

“But have you had your breakfast? Come, no fibs, now.”

“I never tell stories, sir.” And then she unwittingly told one. “I do not care for anything to eat, thank you.”

“What nonsense! Come, I know a nice old place across the street a block down, where they’ve made famous coffee for fifty or sixty years; and another block away, on Church Street, is a first-class German place. I’ve gone without my breakfast on purpose to enjoy it with you, so do not keep me waiting any longer.”

“Really, I do not feel hungry. You must excuse me.”

“But don’t be unreasonable. You are human, and we all have to eat; so why not come along?”

“I have only one wish—to find those lawyers,” Laura replied. “I have been dependent and helpless until the feeling has become torture. I will think you kind if you will leave me, and let me go on by myself.”

“That’s just what I want to speak about. I have great news for you. Let me tell it to you over a cup of coffee.”

“Oh, Mr. Lamont, can’t you see that I want to be alone? Please let me go my own way.”

“But I have found your lawyers—”

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“You have?”

“At least, I have found out this: that there’s a society or company—a sort of guild, you know—of all the lawyers in New York,” said Lamont, who lied as easily as most men tell the truth, “and they have an office uptown where each lawyer registers the names of all his clients. They are obliged to do this, you know, so that no lawyer can pretend he is acting for you or me when he is in reality retained by some one else. I called on my lawyer this morning and he told me about it. It is in Twenty-third Street, and the clerk or superintendent is there from five until six o’clock every evening. I will take you there, and in five minutes we will get the name and address of the lawyers for whom you are looking, and in another five minutes we will telephone to them to come there, or to your hotel to see you.”

“But why should I bother you to go there? I should like to be no further trouble; I am sure you appreciate how I feel.”

“My dear Miss Balm, you can go alone, yes,” Lamont replied; “but do you understand what that would mean—a young lady, with no knowledge of business, not knowing how to guard herself against the wiles of those sharks? Why, you had better stand here and beg, for that is what you

## A VIOLENT COURTSCHIP

would come to. They would simply smile and bow, and put papers in front of you for you to sign, and then show you to the door, and you would find yourself stripped of every claim and right and penny you possess. I suspect you don't know what lawyers are. Well, I do."

"But my father would not employ such men as that."

"Not knowingly, of course, but they are all alike; all honest with shrewd men, all thieves when they get a woman or child or greenhorn in their clutches. No, no; you must have me with you, or some other man who knows their tricks. Otherwise they will find out your business; in fact, the moment you mention your name they have only to turn to their books, and there is everything about you written down. They manage it so that you cannot deceive them, and they can trick you. But if I go with you, I say, 'Now, then, this is Miss Balm, and she has shrewd advisers, and knows her rights, and wants prompt attention and square dealing.' After that they will never try any hugger-mugger as long as they deal with you, because they will know you have a man behind you."

"I never dreamed such things were possible. Why, it is horrible! It hardly seems safe to walk about in such a city."

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“That’s true; if you’ve money, it really is not safe.”

“But my money is nothing. It can only be a few dollars every fortnight.”

“A few dollars!” Lamont exclaimed, pretending great surprise at her innocence. “Whew! if it’s only a dollar, it’s a dollar, isn’t it? Well, ninety-nine others just like it make a hundred, and a hundred hundred are ten thousand, and a hundred times that are a million. When they get that much they retire.”

“And I thought it so safe and simple to go there by myself,” Laura remarked.

“Well, now, come and have breakfast, and we’ll kill the time till five o’clock.”

“No, really, I will leave you now,” Laura insisted. “I will be at the hotel at five o’clock if you will be so kind as to call and take me to that place.”

“How anxious you are to get rid of me!”

“It is that I want to be by myself.”

“You are very unkind,” Lamont pleaded. “Believe me, I will not speak of my—my love—for you until you give me leave.”

“But you do—you have just spoken of it. It is you who are unkind.”

“How unfortunate I am! I could never have

## A VIOLENT COURTSHIP

thought that any one who put himself in your hands as I do could be so unhappy. I live upon the certainty that you will be as kind as your pretty face promises when your mind is at ease. I must try to be patient. Shall I call for you at your room?"

"I will be at the hotel door, the one at which we went in, at five o'clock. Good-bye. I wish you would believe how sincerely thankful I am to you."

"Ah, but you are a wicked little puss. You want to make me angry, but you sha'n't. Now you will wander about by yourself all day, and I will mope around by myself until I see you and hear your voice again."

"I'd much rather be alone," said she, and turned away, full of an instinctive fear of him.

He stood looking after her, inwardly cursing, as did that other man outwardly who gave his name as Legion because of the number of devils that possessed him. This modern Legion took his devils, or was taken by them, to a bar-room for the third cocktail required to tone his system up to the point of taking breakfast. Then he ate a meal in which oranges and Apollinaris played the principal parts; and, after having burned three or four cigarettes before a morning newspaper, in the manner of

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

most latter-day heathen, he boarded an elevated train and rode to Twenty-third Street. Arrived there, he walked westward from Sixth Avenue a short distance to where two tall buildings made noted landmarks, facing one another; the one a great house of flats, and the other a towering pile of lofts. Into this latter building he strode, and mounted the dusty, paper-and-straw-littered staircase to the top, where he pushed a door open, and then another, and found a man of his own age in a sort of office-box built of sashes and glass, and set up like a hot-house on the floor of the loft. It was evident that the building was otherwise untenanted, and that the man he found there had come solely to keep this appointment.

“Morning, Dave. Get my letter?”

“Yes, old man, but—”

“That’s all right. You’ll do it, won’t you, old chap? There’s nothing crooked in it, give you my word. All you do is to clear out a little before five o’clock, come back when I’m in here with the other party, turn the key in the door—both doors—and go home. By-the-way, give me a duplicate key to this door and the other one right away. Lord! I wouldn’t like to be caught in the trap myself.”

“I know, Jack,” said the other; “but what’s the game? If there’s any chance of the police or

## A VIOLENT COURTSHIP

the papers getting wind of anything the whole business falls on me, and father 'd never forgive me."

"Trust me, old fellow," Lamont replied. "I'm not going to give my game away; but I don't mind saying this: it's a little country girl, greener than grass, whom I mean to marry for what there is in it. She's never thought of marrying, and she's so damned near crazy with the adventures she has had that she won't listen to me. But I'll give her nothing else to think of, and then, when she's mine—why, the wind's tempered to this lamb for the rest of his life, that's all. It's everything to me, and I'll make you glad you helped me. On my honor I will."

"Is she so rich?"

"Rich? Who said she was rich? She isn't rich. That isn't it at all. It's this—that if I marry her I inherit a big pot, and if I don't, well, the ghost walks; and between you and me, the ghost's getting devilish tired."

"You don't mean to hurt the girl? Nothing—"

"Oh, come, come! I want to keep her here to-night, and leave her to think she's going to stay till she dries up and sifts through the cracks. If she's as game as I'm afraid she is, I may ask you

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

to keep away from the loft to-morrow and to-morrow night ; there, that's all."

" It mustn't go past to-morrow night," said the person called Dave, " because father will be home by the next day."

" All right ; give me thirty-six hours at the outside. That 'll do for her, you may be sure. Now, positively, no scrub-woman comes in here to clean up ?"

" Only Mondays. She was here yesterday."

" No letter-carriers, or boys, or anybody ?"

" Nobody comes here except father, and he only comes now and then, to get away from people at his office when he is very busy."

" Bully ! Dave, you'll wear diamonds for this," Lamont said.

" Look out it ain't handcuffs in your case, Jack."

" Oh, that's not possible. The jewellery I'll get will be the most costly ornament man ever devised."

" What's that—a brandy nose ?"

" No—a wedding-ring."

" Cigarette, Jack ?"

" Thanks."

" Light ?"

" Thanks, old man. Now give me the keys and I'll go," Lamont added. " I'll be back at a few

## A VIOLENT COURTSHP

minutes after five, and you be scarce at that time, won't you? Then come back, turn the key on us, pocket it, and go home. You're awfully good, old chap. I'll do as much for you, and you know it."

The appointed hour for Laura's meeting with Lamont at the hotel door was the twenty-ninth that she had spent without food. It is not straining the truth to say that she was but just beginning to feel the first pangs of hunger, which excitement had allayed. Even now she more than half satisfied herself that before night, by some magic, inscrutable to her, but dependent upon her finding the lawyers, she would be fully equipped with a home and food, money, and a mind at rest. Thus hopefully she met Lamont, and they walked together the short distance to the warehouse in which we took leave of him an hour or two earlier. As she had never visited a lawyer's office, or seen a lawyer, to her knowledge, she had no idea of what sort of places such men inhabit, and her suspicions would not have been aroused had Lamont taken her into a tenement-house, or even the office of a factory.

"Here we are," he cried, pushing open the inner or office door of the topmost loft. "Why, hullo! No one here? Well, he'll be in directly. Take a chair, Miss Balm, and be comfortable."

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

He set the example, and picking up a newspaper, began to read it. As he was rather making believe read than heeding the print before him, he let his eyes roam over the little ruled-off spaces upon a page of advertisements. Suddenly his eyes fell upon the name of the young lady beside him. And farther along he saw her name again. He uttered an exclamation, and then, to cover his confusion, remarked: "Well, I'm glad I saw that," and folded up and pocketed the newspaper.

A moment afterwards footsteps were heard crossing the loft, and Laura straightened up to be ready for the meeting with the representative of the lawyers' guild. The steps came to the office door, and a hand touched it so that it rattled. Then the click was heard of a key turning in the lock. And then the footsteps retreated, an outer door was opened and closed, and silence was restored.

"Why, the man locked the door!" Laura exclaimed.

Lamont got up calmly, and walking to the door, tried it.

"Yes, sure enough. He locked it," said he. "And now he's locked the outer door," he added, as the louder grating of the key in the farther lock sounded through the thin office partition.

## A VIOLENT COURTSHIP

“Mercy!” Laura loudly exclaimed, in her excitement. “Why? Do call out—or shake that door, or something—quickly! We are locked in! Why do you stand so? Oh, what shall we do?”

“Miss Balm,” Lamont said, in a perfectly gentle, calm voice, that was studied for the occasion, “we are locked in, and we are alone in this great building. It is not a lawyer’s office. I have deceived you. I have brought you here and planned just what has happened in order that I may say to you what I want to, undisturbed.”

“You? What! You sha’n’t do this! Let me out! Call to that man; it is not too late yet. No; let me out, I say. You shall not stop me!”

She ran towards the door, but he stepped in front of her, and, without raising his hand or even his voice, bade her to be calm. “There is nothing to be alarmed at, Miss Balm. On my word I am not going to hurt you.”

“You dare to try it! I am not afraid! I will kill myself—you bad man!”

“Please calm yourself. I am not even going to stay here; not five minutes if you do what I ask, not ten minutes anyway. If you are not reasonable, I shall go and leave you here until you are able to see what is best for yourself.”

“I? You shameful, horrid— What have I

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

done? Oh, merciful Heaven! what have I done, except trust myself to you?"

"You have refused my offer of marriage. I am a gentleman. I give you my word my family is one of the best, and I am a single man. In every way, my offer is honorable. Dear Miss Balm, I am reckless because I am so madly in love with you, and will not be cast off. But think of your own case. You have nothing. Your search for those lawyers is hopeless. You are alone in New York, and I offer you a home, a name as good as any, and comfort—everything to make you happy."

"Go away; leave me! Never, never will I listen to you! You may lock me up—and beat me and starve me; you may cut me into pieces, and with my last breath I'll say the same: 'I hate you! I hate you!'"

"You don't mean that. You cannot hate a man for loving you. Be serious, dear Laura, and listen to reason."

"I will never, never marry you. There, that is my last word. Never! never! never! Now what will you do?"

"I will leave you here till morning. Every time you refuse me I will leave you for a day or a night, until you decide to make us both happy: for I swear to God I will make you happy."



**“ ‘ I WARN YOU—NEVER TOUCH ME ! ”**



## A VIOLENT COURTSCHIP

She flung up her hands with the gesture we make when we abandon a hopeless argument. She was both angry and frightened, and she was bent upon escaping, if it were possible. As he barred her way to the door, she walked in the opposite direction—to the window—and began to try to open it. The paint had stuck the sashes together, and do her best she could not budge the lower one. Baffled and out of breath, she dropped one hand by her side, and leaving the other high as it would reach upon the window, she rested her head against the upraised arm.

Lamont came behind her, and bending so as to bring his mouth above her shoulder, began to plead with mock passion for his suit and a favorable word from her. She hung upon the hand that clutched the sash and swung upon it, making believe that she did not hear him. He saw her other hand hanging limp beside her. It gave him a chance, he thought, to fondle her a little without offence—as lovers do to punctuate their pleadings.

She whipped the hand away and turned upon him with ferocity—eyes gleaming, breast heaving. Think of a tigress, all grace and softness in the sun: that was this heroine as she was wont to be. Fancy that tigress wounded, cornered, and fight-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

ing for her life—and that is the Laura Balm who now faced Jack Lamont.

“Don’t touch me!” she shouted. “I warn you—never touch me! I am not afraid to die, and I am not afraid to kill you.”

“Pshaw!” said he, not contemptuously, but regretfully. His whole plan had been to win her regard, and yet he was obliged to acknowledge that every moment increased the velocity with which it sped from him.

“I do not care,” Laura went on, feverishly, panting as she spoke. “I am all alone and helpless, as you know too well, and I have been tricked and tortured until I can stand no more. I am no longer good. I am wicked. You can easily kill me if you want to. I am willing. But I warn you that you will have to kill me to save your own life, if you lay a finger on me.”

“I am sorry you are so excited,” he said.

“Oh, don’t waste time!” she snapped at him, with her eyes ablaze and her fingers twitching. “Either leave me quickly or touch me again. Touch me—and we’ll have this over!”

“I told you I would not harm you—not for the world,” Lamont said. His tone and his manner both showed how unprepared he was for her violence. “But, Laura, I can’t promise to be always

## A VIOLENT COURTSHIP

patient, for, if ever a woman was worth going to hell for, it is you."

"Don't wait. Touch me now. I want you to."

"I'd rather not," said Lamont, with his sense of humor twitching at the corners of his mouth. "I'll come again in the morning."

## CHAPTER XII

### THROUGH A BREAK IN THE WEB

LAMONT had barely reached the foot of the first flight of stairs when Laura seized a chair and used it to loosen the window and fling it as far open as it would go. Darkness was settling upon the city, the jets on the lamp-posts were making yellow dots up and down the street, crowds of working-folk, shortened into manikin figures by their distance below, were pressing westward towards the river, and a fierce howling wind, almost a gale, was blowing dust in clouds, slamming shutters, making sign-boards groan, and stilling all other noises.

To escape at once, by any means, however dangerous, was the only thought in Laura's mind. By leaning out of the window she could see that there was an iron balcony in front of the window next to it. This led into the same loft, but beyond the office enclosure, and therefore a step nearer to possible freedom. It seemed a bare chance that if she stood on the sill of her window she could

## THROUGH A BREAK IN THE WEB

reach a foot over to this balcony, but the barest chance tempted her in the condition of mind she was in. She carefully worked her body out of the window and managed to stand on the narrow sill, gripping the sash to keep a footing in the gale that dashed against the front of the house and swept it with almost the force of a wave. Her skirts snapped in the wind at first, and then were filled with it until they almost lifted her off the sill as she edged her way to the end, and reached out one foot towards the little balcony. Her nerve was strong. Her recklessness was in itself almost a guarantee of safety, but she gave not a thought to that. However, often as she pointed the toe of her little shoe outward and traced a semicircle with it, in the gale, it did not, and it would not, reach the balcony rail. Therefore she slowly and cautiously turned around until her back was against the window, so that she could fling herself with arms out-stretched across to the projection. The feat was too foolhardy even for her. She did not dare to try it. She might succeed in catching the railing—though there was a greater chance that she would not—but if she did, would her arms support her weight, and had she the strength to pull herself up by them? Never mind, she did not dare to try it. So she felt behind

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

her for the window opening, and put a foot down through it, and then the other, and was presently back in the office again.

It was dark in the office, but there was a gas-bracket there, and she found some matches. When she came to light the gas, she discovered that the burner had no tip. The flame flared up in a fierce blaze two feet high and three or four inches wide at the fullest part. The wind roared in at the window and blew the flame about, writhing and hissing to and fro, and straight out sidewise like a demon's tongue. She had never seen gas burn that way, as it is so commonly seen in Western New York and Ohio. She fancied it dangerous, but she did not care, even a little, whether it exploded or burned the house down. What did anything matter to one so completely at bay, so harried, so desperate as she?

A young man in a window of the tall flat-house opposite had pulled up a shade and looked out just as Laura was flattened like a fly against the front of her window, and trying to reach the balcony. He looked at her with a degree of amazement that the average New-Yorker is schooled to feel very seldom, and never to show. If you fire off a cannon under a true New-Yorker's window, he may lounge across the room in a leisurely way to look

## THROUGH A BREAK IN THE WEB

out of it, because he is human, but he will be ashamed of having done so. An officer of the Lifeguards was lounging up Piccadilly once when an overgrown street boy, whose back was to him, suddenly threw up both hands, and one of them smote the guardsman a sharp blow in the eye. He neither dodged, nor drew back, nor paused in his stroll, nor looked around. He must have been annoyed, and he must have been surprised—probably the blow hurt him—but though no one could have seen an expression of either sensation, we may be sure he regretted having felt a little of both. It was so with Archibald Paton; for he was the man in the window of the opposite building. He knew he could not be blamed for looking at the uncommon spectacle the girl presented, but he would never have owned to the shock of surprise and anxiety that came with the sight.

“ Well, I have heard of trick-horses,” he said to himself, “ and trick-mules, and things, but I never heard of a trick-woman before. I hope her husband’s down in the street with a net.”

Mr. Paton’s home was in another part of town, and this flat from out of which he was looking was the dwelling of a bachelor friend who had gone abroad, exacting from Paton a solemn promise that he would look in occasionally to see that nothing

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

went amiss with the bric-à-brac, paintings, and silver; of which the flat was a rich little museum. As Paton had been there on the previous day, he wondered at finding himself there so soon again.

He walked through the rooms, and then went again to the window from which he had seen the acrobatic young woman. Now the gas was acting as madly as she had been doing before, and she was on her knees with her elbows on a chair, evidently praying.

“By Jove!” Paton exclaimed, “I’d give all the money I’ve got in my pocket to know what she’s up to; and in that building, which I told Billy was the most unpromising building in the whole street. I begin to think better of it now.”

Laura was not praying, though she was trying to. Her mind was too excited, and she could not gather her thoughts even upon her dire need of help. Reluctantly she rose to her feet again, and stood still without any impulse moving her. Then it was that Editha came to possess her brain. When Laura realized, as she instantly did, that this affectionate friend was with her, she endeavored to surrender herself to her influence. But even that proved impossible. She was controlled by the impulse for immediate freedom, and this resolve, adhered to in the face of the apparent im-

## THROUGH A BREAK IN THE WEB

possibility of executing it, made her brain whirl. She found that she could not calm herself even sufficiently to give Editha a hold upon her mind.

“I know what I’ll do,” she thought. “Here is paper and a pen and ink. I will print, in big letters that even a child can read, an account of my plight. I know; I’ll throw it down to a policeman. I *must* escape from here before morning.”

She took a sheet of foolscap paper, and seating herself at a table, began to write.

The spirit of Editha rejoiced at the sight of a pen in Laura’s hand. For days she had awaited the moment when Laura should essay to write even a word, for only at such a moment and through the medium of writing could she give Laura the assistance of which she stood in greatest need.

The moment Laura strove to concentrate her mind in order to reflect upon the words she should write, her friend began to gain control over her. Laura commenced to yield to the kindly influence, and the pen felt the loss of her guidance and lay loose in her hand. Suddenly, to Laura’s surprise, it began to move, so that she was obliged to tighten her hold upon it lest it should fall upon the sheet and blot it. When she grasped it firmly it began to write:

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

*B-r-o*

Laura lifted it from the paper, and looked with astonishment at the three letters which she had written without either intention or understanding.

“Write again—write,” it seemed that the influence counselled her.

Again she held the point of her pen to the paper, and this time allowed it freedom to move itself. This was what it wrote :

*Brown and Crossley, 280 Broadway.*

“My father’s lawyers!” Laura cried. “How very strange! I have tried for days to think of their names, and—I did not write this, for, hard as I have tried, I have not been able to remember even the initial of the first name. It is my angel who has come to help me. I felt her loving presence at once. It was when I began to grow calmer. Now I know I shall escape from that horrid Mr. Lamont. Oh, you dear, good angel! How can I ever tell you—What are you saying? For me to write again? Write more? Yes, yes; I will.”

With feverish impatience she sat up again and grasped the pen. Now it wrote a name over and over again :

*Itha Edi Editha Edi-tha Editha.*

“Editha! that name I thought so lovely at

## THROUGH A BREAK IN THE WEB

the great house in Powellton," murmured Laura. "Then it is the name of my angel! It is she, the one of whom that servant spoke as so good and sweet. My angel, write again. Is Editha your name, and are you the spirit of that lovely lady?"

*Editha Edith-a Edi-tha Editha.*

Thus again this name was scrawled over the paper by the pen in Laura's limp hand.

"Yes, yes; it is she!" exclaimed Laura. "O God, how good you are to me, to give me such a friend! She is an angel, and you have sent her to me. Oh, how weak and sinful I have been to feel so despondent and so angry with that bad man, as if he could hurt me while you and the angels are guiding me! But, Editha, tell me, dear Editha, am I to stay here? Will you not help me to escape?"

"Write, write," she thought the silent urging in her mind seemed to command.

She took up the pen again, and this time it wrote as before :

*Brown and Crossley, 280 Broadway.*

"Your pocket—keep it—save it—pocket," was the admonition which fastened itself on Laura's comprehension. She tore off the address and put it in her empty purse. Then she took up the pen once more, and, as her ally made no offer to com-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

municate further by it, Laura wrote in her own language an appeal for rescue.

*Help! The lady who stands in an upper window is locked in an empty building. Notify the police quickly, or find some one to free her. God will reward you.*

She tore off the fresh leaf on which this was written, and wrapping it around a piece of coal from the stove in the room, leaned out of the window to watch for a policeman. Not one was in sight. Paton was looking at her, but she could not see him because the window at which he stood was dark. She determined to toss the missive down to the first man who came in sight. It was futile to wait for any one to see her. The wind blew so strongly that all the pedestrians bent down their heads as they moved by. When, in a moment, two men came along together, Laura screamed at them and flung down the little package of coal, but the gale tore her voice in shreds and scattered them in the upper air. It also undid the paper and sent it whirling over the roofs, while the bit of coal dropped straight down towards the pavement she could not see on her side of the street.

Three or four times she did this with the same ill success, and then she heard the voice of a man

## THROUGH A BREAK IN THE WEB

from across the street, and saw Archibald Paton, standing in his window, gesticulating with one hand and holding a lighted match in the other.

“What’s the ma-a-a-t-ter?” he called.

“Help!” she screamed back. But the wind was dashing against her side of the street, and she was certain that her voice was stifled in it.

“Can’t he-e-e-ar you,” Paton called. “Can I help you?”

Again she tried to make herself heard and failed.

“Can-n-n’t he-e-e-ar you. Nod—your head—if—you want—me-e-e to—come—to you.”

She nodded her head as those Chinese figures do which have theirs balanced on pivots run through their necks.

“Drop down another paper,” Paton yelled, “when I—am—in the—stre-e-e-et. Drop it down—when—I whistle.”

She nodded again, to show him that she understood.

While Paton was hastening to the ground in an elevator, Laura went back to the office table to write her appeal once more, this time with a firm hope of success. But Laura’s unseen companion dissuaded her. It urged her to put herself in readiness for another message, and this came first from her pen:

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

*Love him.*

“What? Who? Dear Editha, what do you mean?” Laura remained seated with her pen and her mind ready for a further communication, whichever way it might come. Suddenly the pen began to slip out of her fingers, and she caught it and held it firmly, while it wrote again:

*Love him.*

“How very queer! I do not understand,” Laura murmured. “She cannot mean Mr. Lamont. No; I know how earnestly she warned me against him. Love whom, then, I wonder?”

As nothing more came from her spiritual mentor, Laura, for the fourth or fifth time, wrote her short appeal to the public, or the street, or the gale, and hearing a shrill whistle below, cast it away from her as she had done with the others. She thought she could distinguish a man in the road looking up at her, and she tried to aim this last projectile of paper and coal so that it should fall at his feet. As it happened, the wind beat it back against the building she was in, and she felt that there was nothing more for her to do except to wait and to hope. She returned to the office table, and tried to coax her pen and her guardian spirit to continue their disclosures, but the one lay idle, and the other did not counsel her.

## THROUGH A BREAK IN THE WEB

“My angel,” Laura asked, “please tell me, are my troubles over at last?”

“Troubles! troubles!” the soundless voice seemed to repeat.

Laura tried to convince herself that Editha had not thus repeated her own words in a manner so disappointing—or, perhaps, so ominous. She went to the window and looked long and longingly at the one in which the man who had called to her had stood. It remained black and tenantless. As she stood there she thought that Editha whispered, “He will come,” but she was not so certain of that as of all the rest that had taken place. The words “Love him,” which she had unwittingly written, perplexed her. They did more. They brought a slight feeling of shame when she thought of the chance of their being seen by other eyes—or even by her own. She tore them out of the sheet of paper, and was about to crumple the fragment up and throw it away. But she changed her mind, and straightened out the little tatter and put that also in her purse.

Presently there sounded a crash at the back of the loft, as if a window had been blown in by the gale. But no! Irregular footsteps were next heard coming the length of the warehouse floor. The man came to the door of the office.

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“Open the door, please. You can’t? No key? Well, I have one,” he said, and burst the frail woodwork in with a kick.

Then in walked Archibald Paton.

Laura saw him through the haze of her own alarm and confusion—a well-dressed man of thirty, strong and nervous, but yet fine in every detail. His feet were small, his hands were long and slender, and he had the figure of an active and muscular man, yet of one who leads a studious life, for he was slenderly shaped, and his face showed an in-door paleness.

“I got your message,” said he. “And its contents are noted, as they say in business letters.”

Even in his own ears his words were uncouth, and he realized the unnaturalness of his entire manner. This was his way when he was excited. To take part in so sensational an adventure and suddenly to discover that it was a beautiful young lady—and not a scrub-woman or errand-girl—who relied on him for rescue, was too much for his perfect mental balance. Whenever anything excited him he tried to hide the disturbance with affected jocularity, and his friends said of him that when he was in a temper he talked like a live copy of Joe Miller’s *Jest-Book*.

“Oh, sir, please take me away,” Laura begged.

## THROUGH A BREAK IN THE WEB

“I have been so frightened.” She would have said much more, but he stopped her.

“Not a sound, please, till we are out of the woods, as the deer remarked to the rifle. Oh yes, one word: Were you locked in by accident or villany? Villany, eh? Good! I am so glad—I mean villany is exactly in my line. I make a living by it—by writing about it, I mean. I’m a writer—at least, that’s what I want the dear public to think. But we must be going. Got any wraps or rubbers or baggage? No? All the better. Ou-u-uh! How my fool of an ankle does hurt!”

At this exclamation it occurred to Laura that all this time he had been standing on one foot, with the other held high above the floor. His face, too, was at times a little contorted, as if by spasms of pain.

“What is it, sir? You have hurt yourself. You are pale.”

“It’s nothing, as the man said who put his fortune in a lottery and drew a blank. Something broken, I guess; but I wouldn’t care for that if it didn’t hurt. I told the Dutchman—keeps the restaurant on the ground-floor—I wanted to call on you—locked in—that sort of thing. He said a watchman comes every night at eight, whenever

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

he does come. Probably won't come to-night, Dutchman said, account of the storm. Poor sort of watch, eh? Like a sundial—doesn't go in bad weather. Couldn't wait; so borrowed a ladder of the Dutchman—that is, I took it. Mean to ask him for it when I get back. Climbed to the first-story balcony of the fire-escape, and had just put one foot on it when the ladder fell from under me. Foot slipped through the iron bars and I fell back with a wrench—ugh! Don't mention it, please—and there I swung till I learned the trick of climbing up my own leg and getting right end up. I'd no idea it was anything. Felt rather pleasant, as the man said after he froze to death. But, my dear young lady, if you stand here talking much longer, I shall be like the bee in the tar-barrel—unable to tear myself away; it hurts so confoundedly. In two minutes I shall begin to scream as a baby does, you know, when you pin its clothes to its complexion."

He led her gallantly through the inky darkness of the loft, just touching the tips of her fingers and chattering all the while. Thus they reached the frail-looking series of open iron galleries and ladders that ran from story to story down to the ground at the back of the warehouse. The top-most ladder was loose at the bottom, and swung

## THROUGH A BREAK IN THE WEB

like a trapeze. He climbed down on it and bade her follow close after him, within his arms, in fact, as he pushed his body away from the ladder at arm's-length.

"Then the wind won't get at you, and you'll feel me close by and won't be afraid," he told her. "Excuse my hopping, won't you? Look out, now, I'm going to make a joke. I'm hopping because I'm mad at one leg. With all my legs I've only one I care to walk with. The other's turned against me. Oh, by-the-way, my name is Archibald Paton, and I am at your service, and very glad I met you."

When they had battled against the wind down three of the narrow iron ladders and had squeezed through the tiny openings in two of the balconies, they stopped to collect breath and new strength.

"Are you a hypnotist?" Mr. Paton asked. "You must teach me the science when we know each other better."

"I do not understand you. Why do you ask that?" Laura replied.

"Because you dragged me to you against my will. When I got up this morning I had a queer feeling of being owned by some one else. It grew and grew on me until, by early afternoon, I couldn't think coherently. I felt, without knowing what

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

I felt, that something was in the wind. Finally I was literally dragged to that house across the street—not of my own accord, but of yours, I think, for I wanted to go to another part of the city. If you're not a hypnotist you're a witch, so I incline to the former view."

They completed the descent without another pause.

"Now, sir," Paton said to the man at the restaurant counter, "here's my card. I've smashed a window, and a door, and a leg, and if there's anything to pay, there's my address. As to that young lady, I want you to bear witness that I did not carry her off. I intended to, but she had two feet to my one and went of her own accord. I did intend to borrow a ladder of you, but on second thoughts I don't want it. Now, miss, continue the process of abduction by giving me a lift across the street."

Laura had been thinking over the course to pursue once she escaped from the loft. Since several offers of friendship that had been made to her had brought her fresh misfortune, she determined to thank this latest friend and escape from him before he could prove himself like the others. But there was this difference between him and the rest—she could not help feeling that he inspired

## THROUGH A BREAK IN THE WEB

trust and confidence in his honor. She felt that he was a gentleman, and he had shown himself brave. His manner had been gallant, and yet deeply respectful beneath his jocularity. There was in his voice—the surest criterion of our natures—a tenderness which suffused it, a wholesomeness that gave it full body, and a magnetism that rang through it. Though she was sure he was thirty, she thought of him as a big and happy boy. But the more she summed up his merits the more reason she gave herself for parting with him quickly. The memory of this quarter of an hour with him she could treasure. She would not risk his marring it.

“Here’s my home,” said he, as they reached the sidewalk before the apartment-house—“at least, it’s another man’s home, but he’s abroad, and won’t contradict me. We’ll send his servant for mine, and she’ll get us some dinner, and—”

“I thank you so much, but I think I’ll go—go—I’ll go along,” replied Laura, who could not have said where she would go if a Wellesley B.A. had depended on her doing so.

“Go? Yes, you’ll go straight up-stairs with me—that is, if you have an ounce of pity or fairness concealed about you. Have I not rescued you from villainy? You said so yourself. And am I

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

not a writer of books, dependent upon new villainies and stories of hapless ladies for a living? Why, madam, what on earth do you think I went to all this trouble for except to get your story? Come, I'll give you the book with my autograph in it, if you will give me the story to make it of."

"I really thank you so much, but—"

"Desert me after you have handed me over to the servant up-stairs, if you must," said Paton, sucking a long breath through set teeth; "but I really beg you to help me to the flat. I am afraid I have broken my ankle."

"Oh, forgive me! How could I be so thoughtless? Please lean on me, and I will not think of myself until you are cared for."

"You'll excuse my mentioning my ankle, won't you?" Paton said. "It's taken to forcing itself into my thoughts."

## CHAPTER XIII

### LAURA HEARS ILL OF HERSELF

WHEN they were in the picture-like parlor—I use that honest elastic word rather than apply the noble term drawing-room to any bird-cage apartment in a New York flat—and Paton was at rest upon a sofa, the negro servant, who appeared wide-eyed at sight of Laura and of Paton's suffering, was despatched for witch-hazel and lint, and Laura brought the sufferer a sofa-pillow.

"Thank you ever so much," said Paton. "Now, will you please pretend you need to wash your hands? You'll find water and towels in the first bedroom down the hall. Then I'll investigate the wound I've got."

"In my service. I am so sorry," Laura said.

"Rather in my service, in pursuit of material for a story," Paton corrected her, waggishly. "I feel as a clergyman does who goes to see wicked places in order to preach a diatribe, and comes away scarred and bruised in his soul; only he's worse off, for witch-hazel won't help him."

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

Laura left the room, and presently heard him calling, "Hooray! hooray! I'm all right."

She came back and looked at him inquiringly.

"Nothing broken, as the young lady said when the breach-of-promise case ended in a marriage in court. Only a sprain, after all. A wrench, you know, but not a mere monkey-wrench, for it's as big as a gorilla. Now come, my staff and comforter, sit you down and tell me about yourself, but not the whole story yet—only a bare outline, please, because my pain would blur the fine shadings of the whole recital. You came to New York when—What for?"

"Last night, to see the lawyers through whom my father, who is abroad, sends our support to my mother. My mother is very ill in an institution, and so I am quite alone."

"The man who locked you in that building, how did you meet him?"

"In the little town I had just come from every one knew of my misfortune, and he came and told me that some persons who were interested in me had asked him to bring me to New York. He left me at a hotel, and in the morning, when I had gone away early to escape him, because he had frightened me, he met me and told me that in the afternoon he would take me to the lawyers.

## LAURA HEARS ILL OF HERSELF

He brought me to that building opposite, and locked me in there."

"What for? That's the main thing of all."

"He said he—oh, I can't tell you—it's too absurd. He wanted me to—that is, he pretended he—Really, he is a very wicked man, and it doesn't matter what he said."

"Loved you, and wanted to marry you, eh? Yes, yes, I see. But I don't understand why he should—No, I don't mean that. What I mean is, if he is such a villain as he is, I wonder he was not more villainous."

"More villainous? How could he be? Pretending such feelings when he did not know me, and when he is thirty-five years old, at least, and even after I had told him plainly—and oh, so rudely—how I hated—how I felt towards him."

"Well, perhaps you're right," Paton replied, smiling grimly through his pain. "Now, one thing more: how did he inveigle you into that building? Of course you don't know that lawyers never have offices in warehouse buildings, but, aside from that, how did he get you there? I might wish to get a girl in such a place—in a novel, I mean—but I wouldn't know how. Oh, I ought to wait for this story till I'm over this pain, but it's too tempting. Do tell me now."

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

Laura repeated with perfect ingenuousness what Lamont had told her of the guild of lawyers and its central office, and made it appear that the only trick of which she was conscious was that of locking her in after she reached there.

“My word!” Paton exclaimed. “The situation you were in! You are a very lucky young woman. Don’t look surprised, for I am serious. You should thank God all your days for escaping as you have.”

“I do thank Him. I was so frightened. I warned that man that if he—he didn’t go away, I would try to kill him, and he would be obliged to kill me. I know it was wicked, but it seemed to me there was nothing to do but to die.”

“How fearful! Here, in Twenty-third Street, in this time of the world! Such an audacious trick could never have been successfully carried out. By-the-way, when did you eat last?”

“Yesterday noon, sir.”

“What? Yester— Oh, see here.” And Paton jumped from the sofa to seize a chair for use as a cane, and hopped into the passage and along it to the kitchen. From there he called to Laura to come to him. He had poured out a glass of milk and then found he could not hop back with it. He urged her to drink the milk and eat a biscuit, to prepare herself for a dinner, which he cautioned

## LAURA HEARS ILL OF HERSELF

her ought to be of the lightest, under the circumstances.

When both had returned to the parlor the negro servant was heard to let herself in at the kitchen door, and Paton called to her to come to him at once.

“Rub me with that witch-hazel,” said he. “Put a couple of towels under my ankle so as not to spoil Billy’s sofa, and then rub as if you had hold of Aladdin’s lamp. There, slop on plenty of the witch-hazel. Why on earth didn’t you buy a gallon, or a barrel? How cool and good it feels! Harriet, you don’t know the first thing about rubbing.”

“I’s ‘fraid o’ hurtin’ you’ so’ laig, sir.”

“Afraid of doing it good, you mean. Oh, if my Irish girl Annie was only here!”

“I didn’t reckon de Irish was particular good at rubbin’. I alw’ys thought dey was best at pullin’ people’s laigs, sir.”

“Do you hear her?” Paton asked of Laura. “But you don’t understand her, or you would be scandalized. Harriet, you Afro-Americans would joke if the heavens were opening like a scroll and the firmament was tottering.”

“I ain’t no Affer-’Merican, sir. Ouah preacher in de Bleecker Street church once called us Affer-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

'Mericans in his sermon, an' I done laid for him after church, an' I jist give it to him, sir. 'You kin call me colored when you like me,' I says, 'an' you can call me nigger when we quar'l, but don't you never dare call me no Affer'-Merican—'cause dat I won't stand.'"

"There. Now soak that lint with that stuff, sopping wet," Paton said, "and do up that ankle as if it was your own, and the only one you had. And—no, no; don't pin it. Women always pin everything; even stick pins in their skulls to keep their hats on. Just lay it gently around as if it was an ankle that cost money. Now, then, wrap both those towels around it and, no—do swallow that pin. That's another thing women do—swallow pins so as to put their fingers in their mouths and get them when they want them."

"You does know a lot about women, sure, Mr. Paton," said Harriet.

"Why do you say women, merely? Say I know a lot about everything, Harriet; for I know as much about everything as I do about women. But what a sex it is—to produce such a creature as Laura Balm, for instance."

It was fortunate that Laura sat just back of Mr. Paton's head, and that Harriet's back was towards her at the moment, so that neither one saw her

## LAURA HEARS ILL OF HERSELF

start as he uttered her name—and with a semblance of bitterness beneath his chaffing tone.

“Patience’ name! who’s Laura Barn, Mr. Paton?” the servant inquired. “Is dat de woman dat killed her husban’ an’ fo’ children in the Ninth Ward?”

“Balm, not Barn, Harriet,” said Paton. “No, she hasn’t killed her four children yet; but she will, or rather she’ll have six, eight children and two husbands, and do away with them all. At present she is simply a marplot, a witch, a creature without principle or proper human feeling.”

“May I ask who she is?” Laura inquired, schooling her voice, which even then sounded tremulous to her ears.

“You have a right to know my troubles,” he made answer. “And Laura Balm is my greatest. As for who she is, read any newspaper. To-day her name appears in two advertisements in every paper. Two sets of lawyers are seeking her because an old man, my uncle, down at Powellton, has left her everything—a considerable fortune. Oh, if I could meet her I’d—I’d strangle her; in fact, I don’t know what I wouldn’t do. I picture her to myself all day: thirty years old, if an hour, peak-nosed with blue at the end, hollow-cheeked, slab-sided, big-eyed, red-haired, with long skeleton hands and snaky fingers that twine around every-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

thing, even lands and buildings she never saw, and that were to have been mine. But I don't hate her, really, you know. That's more of my nonsense. As a matter of fact, she's a sort of second-cousin of mine, sprung from nowhere—at least, she hasn't sprung yet; that's why they're advertising for her."

"Perhaps she will never be found," said Laura, urged by the quick shock of a generous impulse.

"I'll tell you what makes me care about it, in a moment. There, that's a good job, Harriet; thanks to me. Now, here's half a dollar. Ring for a messenger-boy. Put him in the kitchen, and clap on your hat and go and get my Annie. Then, if you're quick, I'll let you rub my ankle again."

When the servant had gone out of the room, Paton said to Laura: "I don't know why I tell you, Miss— Why, I've forgotten to ask you your name."

He took her completely off her guard, just when a wildly generous thought was fluttering in her brain. The moment she had realized that a fortune had been given to her, to whom the words meant little, and taken from him, who evidently considered them so important, it occurred to her to keep her identity from him. Now that he

## LAURA HEARS ILL OF HERSELF

sprang at her with an unexpected request for her name, her natural impulse wholly controlled her. And these were always generous and kindly.

“My name is Nevill,” she said.

“Nevill? A proud old name. As I was saying, I’m going to tell you because you have so frankly told me your troubles. There’s nothing so consoling as an exchange of troubles among friends, is there? I have asked a young lady to marry me. I may have been hasty or silly, but—Really, it isn’t easy to tell you, after all. Her people are Southerners, poor but excessively proud, and—I gather this from her—very anxious to have her marry a richer man than I. Unfortunately, there is a richer man in the field; he has been there longer than I, yet I have presumed to ask for her hand, and have had a strong chance of inheriting a fortune to back my suit. Now, as I say, my uncle Lamont has made his will and died, and I am only a second-hand sort of heir. He has bequeathed everything to Laura Balm, though, if she remains down whatever well she is hiding in, it all comes to me. Whether the young lady will throw me over—I mean, whether her parents will forbid the match if this cousin be found, I do not know; only I’m afraid.”

“Surely, Mr. Paton,” Laura suggested, “no

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

young lady that you could think of so highly would consider money—”

“Oh, I don’t say such ill of her; Heaven forbid! I say perhaps her parents may influence her. At all events, I have written her frankly that Laura Balm is known to be alive, and will probably take my expected fortune from me. If I knew you better, Miss Nevill, and we were the good friends that I hope we are going to be, I would tell you that this question of how she will take the news is not the gravest one with me. The gravest one is—well, you see, certain little things of late have made me harbor doubts, doubts that I am ashamed of. They are partly doubts of myself, too, so that altogether I am like— Do you know the story of the boy who went to court the girl and lifted the knocker on her door, and then changed his mind and left the knocker in the air and ran away? You don’t? Well, the only point of it is that it shows how queer men are.”

“I am sure you don’t quite understand me, Miss Nevill,” Paton went on, after a pause. “I only hope I don’t frighten you, that’s all. I make light of everything. I do it on purpose. It’s the only way to keep young, and I’d die if I was old; in fact, I will when I am old. I’m certain of it. But

## LAURA HEARS ILL OF HERSELF

there, I am chaffing again. I speak the voice of Bohemia, where things are quite as serious as in any other set, but where we train ourselves to cover up pain, grief, love, sentiment—everything but actual tragedy—with a veneering of fun. Our motto is, ‘What’s the use?’ We are not bad, we American-Bohemians. It is only those who say we are, in cheap literature, that are really wicked. We are simply dynamos of enthusiasm, radiators of optimism, non-conductors of low spirits. But you say you stopped at a hotel. Have you no relatives or friends in town?”

“No, sir. I have but one friend in the country, my mother. I was brought up in Paris partly, and when I was younger, in Antwerp. There we knew many friends.”

“Then I was right, as the duellist said when he killed his antagonist. Why, then, when you talked of going out by yourself you did not know where you were going. I think you should have been more frank with me. Well, to-night you have your choice of two homes of mine. I’ll take the one you leave. I am sure you trust me. There has to be worthiness on both sides where trust is asked and given, and I am sure of your worthiness. Oh, I have studied you. I study people as wiser men pore over books. I judged at once

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

that you were from the country—not from your clothes, for they don't look so. I thought you were either from a village or a very quiet household out of touch with its neighbors. I easily guessed that you knew no more of life, or men, or of the world, than a cat does of opening oysters. And your face and heart—oh, I studied them too. They made me say—do pardon the presumption—that I would thank Heaven if it had given me such a sister."

"I do trust you," Laura said, a little shyly, though from her heart. "I wanted to from the first, but though I have been without a friend or home less than a week, in that time every human being who has offered me friendship, except one beggarman, has proved, oh, so wicked!"

"What a shame!" Mr. Paton said. "And how much worse to think that a young lady should have had such an experience! Never mind, when you are your own mistress, after you have settled your affairs to-morrow, do as I do—make your own world. Make it all kindness and justice and fair dealing. That's how I do. And every now and then I get swindled and lied to, and—I make it all over again. Do you notice the bits of paper all over this flat marked 'Fiddle and I' on every mantel-piece?"

## LAURA HEARS ILL OF HERSELF

“Why, yes; I had noticed them. What does it mean?”

“It’s the name of a song.”

“Oh yes; I know the song very well.”

“Do you? How much better all that you say is than all that I try to say! I was going to tell you what a lovely song it is, fresh and sentimental, and yet full of health and country odors. Billy Wheeler, whose flat this is, heard it somewhere with me, and was so enchanted by it that he meant to get the music. He has no more memory than a china egg, so he wrote the name down a dozen times and stuck it up all over the flat. Before he went away he was too used to seeing the papers to ever give the song a thought, so he will never get it. You say you know it. Would you —could you do me the tremendous favor to sing it for me?”

“I’ll try,” Laura said. “I, too, am very fond of it.”

She went to the piano with no more shyness or affectation of timidity than if she had been alone in the room. Of all that she owed to the wisdom and strong character of her mother, there were few things of greater value to her than the training by which her self-consciousness had been obliterated. From little girlhood she had been ac-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

customed to do her part, to contribute whatever lay in her power, naturally, and as a matter of course, before no matter how large a company or how many total strangers it contained. As her mother's approval was what she valued most, and as her mother praised her sparingly, her nature had not been affected by the compliments and flattery of others. These came to her always in her life abroad, for she lived in an artistic colony there, and her clear, flutelike, simple voice, equally with her kindly nature and bright intelligence, commanded the admiration of all. Though she now went to the piano willingly, she did not do so mechanically, as some do who play and sing whenever asked, yet spoil the very promise of their willingness by their indifference. Laura's manner was that of one who loved what she was about to do, to whom music was a beloved influence, whose calls won the obedience of affection. Archibald Paton, grinding his teeth to control the pain in his twisted ankle, watched her with surprise. He thought he had studied men and women to very little purpose now that he saw a limpid-eyed young lady, the outlines of whose face seemed to speak of no world wider than a mother's glance could sweep, accepting an invitation to sing without a tremor, and walking to the piano with

## LAURA HEARS ILL OF HERSELF

the confidence and grace of a trained performer. The Bohemia whose praises he sung in speech and in his best published work had poisoned his nature to some extent, surely. It had replaced part of his faith and innocence by distrust and super-wisdom, and therefore he thought, as she settled herself at the instrument, "This is truly wonderful; but now, when she comes to sing, shall I have to throw myself out of the window?"

"Whose is the song?" he inquired.

"The words are by Weatherley, and a Mrs. Arthur Goodeve wrote the music," Laura said. "I think it is an English ballad—at least, my copy is English."

She played the prelude easily, lightly, with a free, quick movement and a trained touch. And then she sang, with a little preliminary thickness of voice which had to be cleared, and necessitated one repetition and another of the first line. After that, the simple, bewitching song flowed on as even its composers may have imagined it might be rendered.

There is a part of this song where, when it is well sung, it vibrates the tenderest chords within us by the perfect concord of the simple music and the wandering minstrel's words:

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“ Down by the willow, summer nights I lie,  
Flowers for my pillow, and for roof the sky;  
Playing all my heart remembers—old, old songs from far  
away.

Golden Junes and bleak Decembers rise around me as I play.

“Ah ! it was gay, night and day,  
Fair and cloudy weather;  
Fiddle and I, wandering by,  
Over the world together.”

As Laura sang, with something of her own recent misery tingeing her voice as if it came direct from her heart, the click of the kitchen door sounded, and presently the commanding figure of a handsome woman appeared in the parlor doorway. Hers was a beauty to be called splendid, for she was “fair and forty,” with ample, matronly waist, and the face of a dame of that comfortable type which Rembrandt knew best how to glorify, a matron requiring to be pictured with three or four grown sons or daughters about her. Her atmosphere was magnetized with the high spirits that emanate from a sterling constitution, a quiet conscience, and life-long ease. Her figure stood for heartiness, kindness, and fun personified. Neither Laura nor Paton saw her.

“Bravo ! Splendid!” he shouted, when the song was finished. “I said I had heard it. I never had

## LAURA HEARS ILL OF HERSELF

before. I had only heard *at* it, as the man said who went on three nights to a Chinese play that lasted four weeks."

"It was simply exquisite," remarked the lady in the doorway. "I must hear it all, Archie. I missed half. Introduce me, won't you? Why, what on earth's the matter with you?"

"With me? Nothing. It's you, Helen, who will please explain what brings you here, knowing Billy's away? Miss Nevill, let me make you acquainted with the best and dearest—"

"That's a club phrase, Miss Nevill. We are all each other's dearests and bests in the club to which we belong."

"—dearest of good women, Mrs. Russell. You spoiled an introduction, Helen, which any other woman would have been proud to let alone. Before you explain why you've come, let me say that I'm glad you did."

"Why, we are all coming. Am I the first? 'The Babe' is following with 'the Other Twin.' The others will all be here soon. We found out from your Annie that you were here, else we were going to your flat. 'Sh-h-h! It's a secret. Mustn't say I told you. We are going to suffocate your bad luck in dinner and drown it in wine, to prove that when adversity comes to the Boozers' Club it

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

only binds us the closer together. Oh dear, how awful it sounds to say 'Boozers' Club' before an outsider! Has he explained everything to you, Miss Nevill? We are the Beaux-Arts Club, but we give the name a French pronunciation, which sounds worse than it is. At least, by softening the French we make it sound so."

"We call ourselves the Beaux-Arts Brotherhood to deceive and impress the public," Archibald explained. "Towards the same end, we hold monthly meetings of the Brotherhood in winter, and entertain distinguished artists, poets, generals, explorers, and that sort of people. The club is large and ponderous, but we nine Muses—we call ourselves the Boozes—who are the governors, have an inner club to ourselves."

"Miss Nevill will be here at this dinner?" Mrs. Russell said, half interrogatively. "Why, Archie, then she will see our secret rites. Thus she will become one of us. It is—"

*"It is the law!"* shouted Archibald and Mrs. Russell, in loud unison, in pursuance of a custom in the club.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear," said Mrs. Russell. "We are all nice, if I do say so, who shouldn't. My husband—"

"The Babe," interposed Archibald.

## LAURA HEARS ILL OF HERSELF

—“is an architect, in a way.”

“The most celebrated one in the country,” Archibald put in. “Come, now, Helen; the truth, the whole truth, and not a bit of lyin’, as the Irish judge said.”

“And then Archie, ‘the Brute’—there, I got that in first—so called because he is a bachelor, is the novelist, as you know. Then there’s Mr. Curran, our ‘Paddy,’ who is at least a leading surgeon, and Mr. Wright, who is the Jay Wright who paints so splendidly. Oh, but they all consider themselves very smart men; and we women admit that, in a way, they are fit to be the husbands of their wives, who are, as you’ve heard, the bests and dearests in the whole world.”

“But what rot it all is! I have only sprained my ankle. That’s not worth a spree of the Boozers, Helen.”

At this, which was news, the mother in Mrs. Russell came uppermost with a bound. She demanded to know when and how and why he sprained his ankle; how he knew it wasn’t broken; what had been done for it, and what was to be done; why he did not show it to her, *et cetera* and *ad infinitum*. At the end of this tornado of questions and exclamations she took Mr. Paton in charge, almost bodily.

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“Witch-hazel?” she exclaimed. “Witch-fiddlesticks! What you want is kerosene. Come with me to the kitchen at once. I can’t touch the nasty stuff, but Harriet is there. Come along, quick, before the club swarms in.”

Archibald was excused by Laura, and repaired with Mrs. Russell to the kitchen, where Mrs. Russell shut the door behind them, and said, “Of course witch-hazel is best, and you know very well I only spoke of kerosene to get you away, and ask you who—why—what—where did you find that most beautiful girl?”

“She’s a Watteau improved, done on ivory, too, isn’t she?” Archibald asked.

“She’s adorable, and so lovely in every other way, apparently. But,” Mrs. Russell urged, “you are to talk, not I. Tell me her entire history, from her birth until now, in one minute.”

Mr. Paton told the history of one hour of Laura’s life in fifteen minutes instead.

Mrs. Russell ran back to the parlor to catch Laura by the hand, and pull her into her arms and kiss her.

“You poor dear child!” she cried. “You dear, sweet, unfortunate thing! Archie has told me everything. I never, never heard of such misfortune in my life. But it’s all over now. I am go-



**“ ‘YOU POOR, DEAR CHILD!’ SHE CRIED”**



## LAURA HEARS ILL OF HERSELF

ing to Archie's flat with you to be company for you during the night, and you shall tell it all to me for myself, and we'll have a good cry together, and then a laugh to go to sleep on. At last you've fallen among friends. To-morrow you will see the lawyers and be mistress of your own future. And listen, dear, Archie and I have made up a plan to put you and every one else at ease to-night. You are to be introduced as Archie's cousin who came in from the country and was with him when he twisted his ankle. I shall say he was jumping out of the way of a bicycle if any one pins me down. There, now, a good kiss as friends, and I must run back to Archie. You need not be ashamed to be called his cousin, for he's a true man, all good and honest through and through."

## CHAPTER XIV

### LAURA SEES EDITHA

THE dinner of the Muses of the Beaux-Arts Brotherhood was like no other that night in all the world. When Joseph Russell, known there as "the Babe," and elsewhere celebrated as the cleverest of the young architects of the day, came to the flat, he brought not only a servant-girl, but a basket containing a chafing-dish, oysters, sherry, powdered crackers, and even the condiments for seasoning the delicate dish he was to cook. In that coterie the men held that women cannot cook, and the women selfishly abetted them in that conclusion. Edward Metcalfe, a wealthy broker, who had grown rich by a bold railroad transaction which the rest of Wall Street did not understand, brought another chafing-dish, plenty of eggs, a bottle of Parmesan cheese, a pot of cream, and half a pound of butter. He was called "the Other Twin," because he and Philip Lord, another broker known as "the Twin," were so much in each other's company. Lord could not come that

## LAURA SEES EDITHA

night. Arthur Ford, a physician, and James Riggs, editor of the *American Quarterly*, brought wine—a bottle of cocktails and some thirty-year-old claret being the doctor's contribution, while two quarts of champagne of '89 and a bottle of brandy composed the editor's mite. These two were called "Pard" and "Cully," or the bar-tenders to the other Muses. Harold Foster, known as "Slippers" in the club, because of his partiality for his own fireside, came with the cigars, and left behind him his celebrity as a musical critic and as the champion of Italian opera against the half-dozen so-called musicians of futurity who have taken a present lien on popular taste. There came also Charles Kellogg, the well-known pleader, who made law-suits famous or stupid according as he was in or out of them; a knight of old for courage and championship of justice, whether it was needed by millionaires or by women and boys without a penny. He was known as "the Worm," because nothing could be more ridiculous than to dub him so. These were all who came, but two brought men-servants to wait upon the table, and several came with maid-servants to cook and wash dishes. Each member also brought his wife, a first principle with these prosperous bohemians being that a wife and her husband must figure as a unit, or

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

else are not worthy to be included among the Muses. And the wives were as active and bright as the men, barring the fact that, being women, their sense of fun suffered limitations. Practical joking, for instance, even of the gentlest, most whimsical sort, formed part of a land over whose wall they often peered without even faintly comprehending the genius of what they saw.

The dinner went with enough spring to lift the safety-valve of a students' feast. The Babe cooked his oysters *à la Richmond* at one end of the table, and the Other Twin buttered his chafing-dish, spread its bottom with a paste of Parmesan and cream, and while that was cooking, in the melting butter that had been first put there, he filled the dish with beaten eggs, and heaped on more cream and cheese just at the moment for stirring all the ingredients together before the eggs were cooked. Archibald Paton had come into the room using a table-leaf for a crutch, and declaring that he would stand up and look on, as his pain was too great to permit his sitting at the table. Presently, by using an extra chair for his wounded ankle, he was able to seat himself out of the way of the waiters. That he was comfortable under this arrangement became evident from the part he took in the bairnage and hilarity around him.

## LAURA SEES EDITHA

When the supply from the chafing-dishes was exhausted, a roast with vegetables, cooked elsewhere and newly heated in the kitchen, came, and was followed by pudding and cheese. Last of all, coffee was made upon the table in a patent pot brought by one of the ladies, and all the while sparkling repartee, comical stories, and witty remarks, like that of the Brute, who said he was "looking for a flat with an elevator, because he was tired of going up-stairs on his hands and knees every night," flew to and fro like the balls in a tennis-match.

When it happened that a story was demanded of Archibald, he turned to Laura Balm, saying, "I will speak for Miss Nevill, if she will allow me," thus illustrating a singular custom of the Boozers, whose rule was to tell no story and make no speech except in the name of the raconteur's wife, or, in the case of the only bachelor, the name of a lady he must choose for the purpose. Thus these bohemians kept out of their fun all coarseness and *risqué* story-telling, agreeing to indulge in none, and making the women mother every one of their tales, as a guide to all strangers who came to their feasts. "What's the Use?" was their motto in regard to all gravity, and this form of levity in the bargain.

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

Another club law was to announce the motive for each gathering with the draining of the coffee-cups. It was the part of the Other Twin to make the announcement on this occasion. When the time came for the toast, the men lifted Paton off his chair and laid him on the table-leaf that he had used for a crutch. They took down a portière of claret-colored plush heavily bordered with gold fringe, and wrapped it around him from his breast down, so that he looked as if he was in a gorgeous bag. Then they lifted him, still on the board, to the centre of the table, where, with an inverted wash-bowl under the head of the board, and a silver wine-cooler under the end of the gaudy wrapping which concealed his feet, he looked like a carved knight on a highly colored mediæval tomb. Then the men poured wine down his throat occasionally, at the peril of his life.

“We, speaking for the Twin, who could not be here to-night,” said Mr. Metcalfe, “and for Mrs. Lord and my wife, have now to state the reason for this dinner, and I propose to put it in the form of a toast. The toast is, ‘Archie Paton, and may he never need sympathy again, or fail to find it, if he does need it, as abundant as we have shown here to-night.’”

There was a shuffling of feet as the men and

## LAURA SEES EDITHA

women pushed back their chairs to rise, and a murmur of approving voices around the table.

“One moment,” said the Other Twin. “To this toast I wish to add another: ‘Confusion to Laura Balm!’”

“No!” Paton called out, struggling to a sitting posture and upsetting the wine-cooler that had raised up his lame ankle. “Withdraw that addition. I beg that no one drinks till that’s withdrawn. It sours all the kindness in the first toast.”

“Withdraw it! Withdraw it!” half a dozen voices called.

“Never!” exclaimed the Other Twin. “But if you all feel that way I’ll lay it on the table, to be cleared away with the débris of the dinner.”

“Now, then,” Archibald began his response. “I thank you all for this testimonial of your willingness to eat a Boozers’ dinner in my behalf. It is touching; perhaps, thinking of how I saw the Worm attack the various dishes, I should say filling. No, but I really do think, indeed I know, that you are the very best fellows—I include the women also—who ever adorned a man’s path in life. You men shade and shelter that path in hottest sun and coldest wind. You women strew it with the flowers of your beauty and hedge it with the greenery and buds of all the ever-fresh charms

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

of your dear womanhood. Between you all, I live and walk in a green and blooming bower. I did walk, I mean, until this afternoon. I thank you and drink to you, though it requires heroism, for I know that liquor will quarrel with my ankle.

“ But, now as to Laura Balm. I want you to drink her good health. I have heard nothing from Powellton. I do not know why my uncle thinks there is a hidden daughter of his vanished sister, or, if there is, why he thinks she is alive. But, dear Boozers, he must have known, for he has left her his property. She is my cousin; but, more than that, she is a woman; better than that, she is a lady. I rather think she is poor. Perhaps she may need what is about to fall in her lap. At all events, she has not injured me; for I may tell you that my uncle offered to make me his heir, but as he insisted I should take his name also, I declined the honor. It went to Laura Balm. In the name of Miss Nevill, I raise my glass to the health of my cousin, and ask you to do as much for me—to wish her the quick possession of her wealth; to think of her—why not?—as of the best type of American womanhood, than which the sun shines on nothing fairer or nobler or better. To Laura Balm: Good health—good luck to her !”

## LAURA SEES EDITHA

The dying notes of the uproar of approval of this toast were jarred by a convulsive sob from Laura. Tears had burst from her eyes, and she had covered her face with her napkin to hide them, and to smother the sounds of an outburst of emotion that she could not control. Mrs. Russell ran around the table to her to soothe her.

“What is it, dear? Why are you crying?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” Laura sobbed. “I am so ashamed.”

“You are tired, dear, after your day’s adventures,” Mrs. Russell said. “We’ll go home very soon now.”

A whisper ran around the table that this cousin of Archie’s had been touched by his reference to the other one who was missing. The Worm was for distracting every one’s attention from Laura by a kindly stroke.

“Is Billy’s cook, Harriet, here?” he asked. “Then let’s get her to sing one of her Jersey camp-meeting songs.”

“She won’t sing before so many, but we will ask her,” Archibald said.

Harriet was called for, and came, looking like a personification of the traditional quarrel between white and black, so ebon-toned were her face and

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

hands, so snow-white her apron, her eyes, and her teeth. The men gathered around her and urged her to sing. She would not even discuss the proposition until they said it was necessary to cheer up the young lady.

“I cain’t, no use a-talkin’,” said she. “I never sung ‘fore so many white folks.” But it was evident she was yielding.

“You sing, and I’ll pass the plate,” said the Babe.

“She’ll want to see the collection first,” Archibald ventured. “Since she went to Newport with Billy’s sister, and got such a lot of tips, Harriet has large ideas about money.”

“Tips?” Harriet said to him. “I’s waited on you a long time, Mr. Paton, and I never s’pcioned you knowed what tips was.”

“Oh! oh!” broke forth a chorus of applauding cries from the men. “That’s too good. That will stick to Archie as long as he lives.”

“I’ll sing,” said the cook; “but I’ll have to stand out yonder in de hall whar nobody can’t see me. And it won’t be no camp-meetin’ song neither, ‘cause I ain’t feelin’ camp-meetin’ y to-night. I warn you I’ll sing somethin’ real ba-a-d.”

She went down the passage, and the company waited in silence, for this colored woman had a great fame for her darky songs, her rich dialect,

“ ‘ I WARN YOU I’LL SING SOMETHIN’ REAL B-A-N-D ’ ”





## LAURA SEES EDITHA

and a falsetto voice of indescribable headiness. Presently she sung, but not until she had made several feints and misstarts, accompanied by stagy "asides," such as "I cain't," "Dey's just foolin' with you, girl," and "Shorely 'tain't no use o' tryin'."

" Some folks say dat a preacher can't lie.

    Oh, I's a-seekin'.

One of 'em told me he heard a angel fly.

    Oh, I's a-seekin'.

Said he was lookin' for him in my bag o' meal :

The good Lord knows dat a preacher won't steal.

    Seekin' de promuss land.

" Folks do say dat a preacher won't steal.

    Oh, I's a seekin'.

But I cotched one of 'em in my corn-fie'l'.

    Yes, I's a-seekin'.

He said he was a-prayin' whar no one was nigh :

The good Lord knows dat a preacher won't lie.

    Seekin' de promuss land."

Mrs. Russell and Laura were the first to leave after Paton had been lifted from the table and carried back to the sofa in the parlor. He exacted from Laura a promise that she would call upon him the next day with the news of her visit to the law-office.

" I can never thank you enough for all your kindness," said she.

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

“Come with good news of yourself to-morrow, that is all I ask of you,” said Paton.

In the bedroom in which she slept that night with Mrs. Russell a large oil-painting of an extremely beautiful lady hung opposite the foot of the bed. The face was that of a dainty, high-bred woman of little more than girlish age, and of the deepest brunette type. Though the face was of this type, it yet symbolized delicacy and purity in as high a degree as any blond visage which painters have used to typify the same standards. The head was small, but proudly poised. The forehead was high and rounded. The eyes were softly brown, with jet lashes under blackest brows, which contrasted strongly with the fair, peach-tinged complexion. The slender nose was distinguished by sensitive nostrils, and the mouth suggested two rose leaves rolled together.

“Oh, what a beautiful face!” Laura called out, as she stopped before the picture. She stood and continued to gaze at it, conscious that an uncommon force riveted her before it.

“It’s a picture of Archie’s aunt Editha,” Mrs. Russell explained. “It’s a copy he had made of a painting in his uncle’s house in Dutchess County. He raves over it. He has sent it to many loan exhibitions, and it is quite famous.”

## LAURA SEES EDITHA

An inexpressible delight dominated Laura as she heard this.

"It *is* Editha!" she murmured inaudibly, to herself. "I might have known it. I instantly felt a fascination such as no picture ever exerted upon me." Aloud she said, "What a beautiful woman she must have been!"

She forced herself to keep awake until she thought her companion was asleep, and then she crept out of bed and went noiselessly to a desk in the front room. Eagerly she searched for pen and paper, and then waited, courting a written message from Editha. There presently came an indescribable sense of a caress that was warm without warmth, and that was not tangible and yet made itself felt. However, no impulse to use the pen came to her.

"Have you nothing to write to me?" she asked, with her mind. She fancied that her beloved Ethe-rian whispered to her to sleep, but she was disinclined to return to bed without another celestial message in writing. As she sat wishing for a communication, there came to her consciousness an impression that to-morrow held new and serious trouble in store for her, and that Editha would be with her. She returned to the subject again by mental questioning of her unseen friend, but with

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

no other result than that the warning remained with her, and presently Mrs. Russell came stumbling into the room.

“My dear child,” she said, “you will get your death! What are you doing clad like that in this room? I missed you. Do you walk in your sleep?”

“I was trying to think—that is, I could not sleep,” Laura replied, allowing herself to be led back to the bedroom. Soon afterwards, just as she felt herself passing from wakefulness, the extraordinary appearance of the painting opposite the bed caused her to concentrate her gaze upon it, and to rub her eyes and stare at it again. Though the room was dark and nothing else was visible, the picture shone upon the wall. It grew brighter as she looked, for her Etherian friend had raised herself to a place before the painting. By a great effort Editha intensified the otherwise invisible ray which was her soul—herself really—and Laura saw this against the frame and canvas. To Laura’s imagination, at least, the portrait was vaguely, faintly visible—so faintly that no part of it was as distinguishable as the golden frame, and even that was lighted rather by a luminous mist than by any light to which human eyes are accustomed.

“Are you awake?” Laura asked.

## LAURA SEES EDITHA

“Yes, dear,” Mrs. Russell answered.

“Look at that picture. It is lighted up,” said Laura.

Mrs. Russell opened her eyes and slightly raised herself to see better. On the instant the luminous effect disappeared.

“I can see nothing,” Mrs. Russell answered.

“It is not so now,” Laura said.

A few minutes later the light appeared again, and now Laura believed that it began to reveal the features of the portrait. Presently she was sure she saw the face and the loose white under-robe flaring open like a lily beneath the heavy blue gown.

“Now look! Look at the picture!” she called to her companion.

Again the good-natured matron rose up in bed, and again the vision instantly disappeared. Mrs. Russell felt impelled to pass her hand over Laura’s face and arms, and was astonished to detect no signs of feverishness. She threatened quinine and a bottle of hot water for Laura’s feet, and declared herself positive that Laura was going into an illness. “The day’s excitements have been too much for you,” she remarked, “and I don’t wonder.”

Laura yielded, as her affectionate companion took her in her arms and tried to put her to sleep

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

with motherly caressing, but she was wildly impatient that slumber should come first to Mrs. Russell, in order that she might watch the portrait. She was not so dull as to fail to see that the Etherian had no intent to be observed by other eyes than hers.

In time Mrs. Russell's embrace loosened and her louder breathing apprised Laura that she was asleep. The younger woman turned stealthily over in the bed and was free. Then it came to pass that the light reappeared, and the picture was again revealed. More than that, the portrait began to draw nearer, as if it was coming out of the frame, and yet this was not so, for, as it unmistakably moved towards her, slowly, very slowly, Laura saw behind it, yes, and through it, to the canvas and the frame at the back. Nearer and nearer it came, until there stood beside the bed, not two feet from Laura, the figure of a beautiful young lady with a mass of jet-black hair caught up behind her head, with kindly brown eyes and a rosy ripe mouth, a lady in a dark blue wrapper open above the waist, and disclosing the same flaring white under-robe that Laura had remarked in the painting.

By an extraordinary effort, called forth from her great love for Laura—as it must be by some in-

## LAURA SEES EDITHA

tense emotion in all such cases—Editha was revealing a spiritual suggestion of her former earthly appearance. She stretched out her beautiful rounded and rosy arms towards Laura, and her face became glorified by an angelic smile.

“Editha! Editha! My angel!” Laura called, reckless of the presence of her earthly companion.

As she spoke the vision melted away; but Laura quickly felt the loving presence of the Etherian caressing and finally enfolding her, and, in an ecstasy of satisfaction, she fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE WEB DESTROYED

AFTER they had breakfasted, Mrs. Russell took leave of Laura, who was to go on her second quest of Brown & Crossley's law-offices. She was still without even the money for car fares in her pocket, but her heart was too big with hope for her to heed her penniless condition. After she had found Broadway it was an easy matter to determine the direction in which the numbers diminished towards their beginning, and to follow them down to Chambers Street, at the corner of which was 280, the number she sought. Her visit created in the little Pullman-like series of glass-walled compartments inhabited by the attorneys and their clerks so much stir as to strain the circumspect and dignified routine of those gentlemen. The words spoken to the boy at the door, "Please say that Miss Balm is here," ran like electricity from boy to typist and junior to senior, tingling through them all to such purpose that each made an excuse to pass through the waiting-room, and to cast

## THE WEB DESTROYED

a furtive glance at the slight girlish figure in gray, straw reticule on lap, seated before a formidable wall of books in yellow leather.

Mr. Brown, upon whom fell the duty of waiting upon her, was an office lawyer and a bachelor, who appeared to regard women as exceedingly fragile creations in egg-shell porcelain or blown glass, requiring the most delicate handling and the lowest audible tones in conversation. He quickly got behind Laura, and walked on tiptoe, with his hands outstretched beneath her elbows, touching them occasionally as if to prevent her falling over frontwards or backwards and smashing herself into as many bits as a tumbler comes to at a Jewish wedding. Having thus guided her without mishap into his office, he pursued her until she was in front of a great padded leather chair, when he grasped her elbows as lightly as a fancier of Venetian glass handles that ware, and by a firmer pressure brought her without disaster down upon the soft seat. Then he questioned her in hushed and awesome whispers, appearing startled at the fulness of her voice, each time that she replied to him.

“More than anything else,” she ventured, “I want to ask you if you have any money from my father to send to my mother, and find out whether

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

they will allow me to go and see her. They told me it would be weeks before she would be calm enough to receive me, but I do so want to see her."

"I will telegraph, and you shall know to-day," the lawyer replied, reserving in his thoughts the necessary condition that Laura should first prove herself to be his client's daughter.

Mr. Brown was a shrewd man beneath all his shyness, and yet, after the greatest pains in his cross-examination of her, she convinced him of her genuineness. When he felt no doubt remaining, he led her back to the story of her misadventures, and listening now as if for the first time, was greatly agitated and distressed. He assumed that she would command him to have Lamont arrested, and her refusal to do so put him extremely out of sorts. He was at first disinclined to regard her refusal as seriously intended.

"It is a crime to condone a crime," said he, in a sepulchral whisper. "Do you know that we go so far as to call it 'compounding,' miss? Compounding a crime, that's what we call it."

"He is my cousin," Laura declared, "and that pleads for him. I could never begin my existence in that household by making a public scandal."

"Purely a woman's reason," Mr. Brown whis-

## THE WEB DESTROYED

pered. "My partner will call it fantastic. However, in considering it, I will look at it from your point of view."

When Laura refused to have him announce to her uncle's attorneys the fact of her having been found, the blow to Mr. Brown's sense of order proved fearful. It was when he discovered that she could give no better reason than that her appearance might interfere with Archibald Paton's success in a love adventure that the mouselike man was overcome. He tried to whisper, but a mere gasp followed. He tried again, and no sound came. He rolled his eyes at her as if he was expiring, and then sank back in his chair in a limp heap. Before she knew whether to scream or rub his wrists or throw water in his face, he rose up, and feebly struck a bell that was on his desk.

"It's a case for Mr. Crossley," he whispered. "He has a wife *and* a daughter. He will know how to meet this—extraordinary—whim."

Mr. Crossley was a very little, very nervous, very restless man, of the height and slender shape of a boy, and dressed in a boy's short coat and little collarless waistcoat. The energy he spent in putting his glasses on his nose, in taking them off and whirling them around one forefinger, and in replacing them on his nose and taking them off,

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

and whirling them again, would, if used to generate heat, have warmed an ordinary hall bedroom in mid-winter. His possession of a wife "*and a daughter*" rendered him so at ease with their sex that he used extremely violent language the moment the case was whispered in his ear by his partner.

"Can't have it, madam," he shouted; "not for one instant."

"I haven't told you all my reasons—" Laura ventured, but got no further.

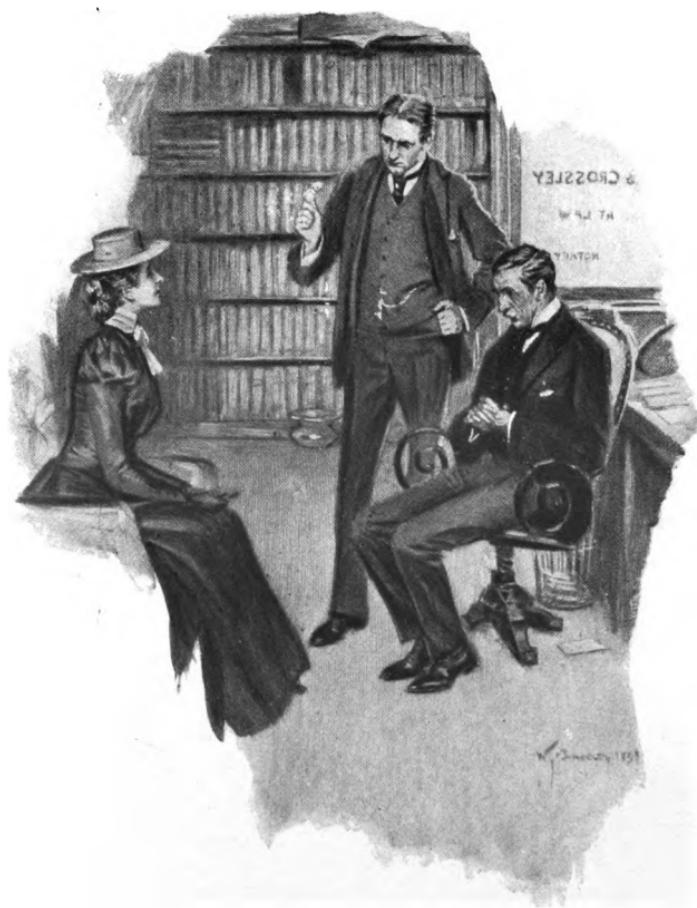
"There can be no reasons. It's infernal nonsense—childish, sentimental, poppy-cockish nonsense! Worse, it's distinctly and undeniably criminal, and we'll have no part in it."

"I must tell you, please," Laura said; "I am so sorry you think as you do, but surely it's my property to take or to leave. And I only ask to keep hidden a few days until Mr. Paton receives an answer to a certain letter he has written to a lady."

"Tut, tut; but go on. It's idle, but I will hear you," Mr. Crossley growled.

"He saved my life, sir, and hurt himself terribly. And he is a man, sir, and would know how to manage the property better than I."

"Oh-h-h-h!" Mr. Crossley roared. "Only a mo-



“‘CAN’T HAVE IT, MADAM,’ HE SHOUTED”



## THE WEB DESTROYED

ment ago it was to be for a few days, and now you propose to give him the property!"

"Truly, I would rather," Laura acknowledged. "I never knew the Lamonts or heard of them. I have been poor always, and would be better content with what little I could earn for myself. Then, you know, sir, he expected to be the heir; he counted on it, and made plans in that expectation."

"Miss Balm," said Mr. Crossley, whirling his glasses under her nose, and then whipping them on to his own and off again—"Miss Balm, this is very amusing. I will not say creditable, because that would be flattery, and false besides; an infernal falsehood. It is very amusing, I say, but it is not business. We are your lawyers. What are lawyers for, eh, madam? They are for business—the business of setting things straight, and advising the ignorant, and controlling erratic, sentimental, and disordered views of things. As your lawyers, madam, we shall take you at once to Messrs. Green and Shipton, and declare you as the heir to Colonel Lamont's estate."

"We shall," Mr. Brown whispered.

"I seem peremptory," Mr. Crossley continued, "and harsh, but I am acting as the law directs, and in your interest."

Laura, quite overcome by a sense of extraor-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

dinary misbehavior, ventured no further remonstrance.

At the offices of Messrs. Green and Shipton she paid a more satisfactory visit. The partners were elderly men, easy, paternal, and sympathetic. They humored her, and while seeming to allow her to have "her own head," as the horsemen say, really led her to modify her plans so that possession of the estate was to be taken in her name on the following day. A man was to be sent at once to relieve Mr. Borrowes by assuming charge of the property, but the newspaper advertisements concerning Laura were to continue to be published for two or three days afterwards. Mr. Shipton proposed to call for her at her lodgings that afternoon to take her to his home, that she might make his wife's acquaintance. He said that Madam Shipton, as he called her, would prove of great service in supervising the preparation of an outfit of clothing such as he was sure Laura would require in order to take her place at the head of her new home and in the neighborhood circles. Both these lawyers succeeded in making her feel that they were her friends first and her agents afterwards. They promised to bring her that afternoon whatever news of her mother was obtained by Brown and Crossley. They also arranged that

## THE WEB DESTROYED

her indebtedness to Mrs. Turley should be at once discharged, and her own and her mother's belongings should be removed to the Clock House. Pocket-money, as they called it—though Laura thought she could never use as much as either firm gave her—was pressed upon her at both the law-offices, and Messrs. Green and Shipton urged her to draw upon them freely to meet any needs she incurred while in New York. Accompanied by a clerk whom Mr. Shipton sent with her, she rode back to Archibald's flat in the state of mind of a person under enchantment. So poor that morning, so friendless only twenty-four hours before, so put upon and persecuted during nearly a week, so hopeless and forlorn when dire calamity had befallen her mother only a fortnight ago; but now, with ready money plentiful, deferred to by men of influence, escorted about the city, treated by every one as a person of wealth and consequence, and, more than all, again in communication with her mother—small wonder that her body should feel light as air and her feet should seem to tread the clouds!

“At any rate, my visit to these lawyers will not be known until Mr. Paton receives his answer from that lady.” This thought rose in her mind, and gave her satisfaction.

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

Eagerly she went from Archibald's flat to that in which he was staying. She tried to define the feeling she had for him; the cause of his appearing in her mind like an associate in well-established friendship. Sometimes she thought this the natural outcome of the important aid he had rendered and she had received. Truly, if politics makes strange companions, peril works quicker with all companionships. Sharing the excitement of the rescue from the warehouse—with his pain to match her alarm—surely this might account for and excuse her eagerness to see him. Then she recalled his ease of manner and kindly light-hearted way in sober junctures. True, his jocularity somewhat belittled even her own estimate of his heroism, but—how eloquent this was of modesty! And he was so handsome (here she was descending to girlish sincerity). And such a gentleman. And a great writer too! And in love. How romantic!

Alas! She had meant to be romantic also, until Messrs. Green and Shipton bluntly assured her that Archibald's heart could not break if a girl showed herself so mercenary as to consider the claims of love only conditional upon their securing her a fortune. Messrs. Green and Shipton also declared that Archibald would, in all likeli-

## THE WEB DESTROYED

hood, decline to assume control of the Clock House estate unless proof of the death of the alternative heir made him secure in that relation. Dear, dear! what a silly, practical world she had fallen into! But it was not a bad one, she felt without formulating the acknowledgment, where friends and money and kindness thrust themselves at her from every side.

Should she tell him that afternoon who she was? She might as well. True, she had obliged two firms of lawyers to pledge themselves to bury the secret for a few days; but what of that, since she must so soon abandon her romantic plan? It would be inconsistent; it would "seem queer," was the way she put it; but Archibald had spoken so loyally and gallantly of her as his cousin, and the sooner she told him the more quickly he would feel towards her like a cousin. On the other hand, it would not be very easy to make the announcement; indeed, she did not see how she could ever explain to his face why she had not done so at first.

She decided to wait until he had heard from the lady.

A pleasant hour and a half spent at luncheon, hearty congratulations from Archibald, and a song or two by her were therefore the main happen-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

ings during her second visit to the flat where the wrenched ankle imprisoned the light-hearted man of letters. As he was advised to keep upon his back, and found himself as comfortable in his friend's quarters as he could be anywhere, he insisted that Laura should remain in his home, with his servant to wait on her, adding that it would be all the more pleasant for her if she assured herself of sufficient permanency there to call in a dress-maker, who would provide companionship as well as further the work she was planning.

She returned to Archibald's flat in time to keep her appointment with Mr. Shipton, who drove her to his residence, and, on the way, gave her cheering news of her mother's condition. The dinner was very formal and elaborate; but Laura spent a pleasant couple of hours afterwards with Mr. Shipton's motherly wife and two daughters of about her own age. She came away charging her mind with many friendly promises of shopping tours with these ladies, and somewhat astonished by the contemplation of the quantity of dresses and garments of many sorts which they had, with some difficulty, convineed her that she needed.

At a little after nine o'clock that night she was once again back in the luxurious little flat, free from even recollected dangers, and happier than

## THE WEB DESTROYED

she had been at any time since her misfortunes began.

Suddenly an unaccountable disquiet surged upon her. She noticed it first in a sensation of restlessness, but it presently attacked her nerves, and then a nameless fear seized her. It was as if she had been suffering an intense nervous strain which had been suddenly released, leaving her in a state of physical exhaustion. But the worst effect was upon her mind, which was seized with a dread of approaching calamity. The premonitions of the coming of death which we read of as impressing men at times are mild, if they have been correctly described, when compared with the sensation Laura felt, for hers was rather to be likened to the panic of a gentle animal that is hunted by a superior and cruel adversary. The quaking of the earth under the feet of men gives to the more timid among them precisely the feeling which now overcame her. Afraid to remain alone, she was about to call the servant, upon some pretext of needing her, when the girl came of her own accord.

"I doan't loike the luks of him," said she. "The vagabond! He's handed in this at the dure. Pl'ase rade it, ma'am."

She handed to Laura a small piece of folded

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

paper, and Laura read it aloud: "Mr. Paton wants Annie O'Brien to come to him at once. He will need her about an hour."

"Why," Laura exclaimed, "this is not a gentleman's writing! And it is not signed!"

"Mebbe that nagur woman wrote it, ma'am," Annie suggested. "It has a nagurry look about it. Sure I'd mistrusht it intoirely, except that mebbe she wrote it. Will I go, miss?"

"I think you had better," Laura said.

Presently the rear door of the flat closed behind the servant, and the sound it made was followed by a knock at the front door, not far from where Laura was seated. She answered the summons, and found herself face to face with Bill Heintz. Before she realized his purpose he had pushed past her into the room, and another loaferly-looking man had taken his place in the doorway.

"What do you mean by coming here? Go out, sir! What do you want?" Laura demanded, bravely, though she felt her heart grow pulseless and heavy.

"By thunder! You have struck it rich, haven't you?" Heintz exclaimed, as his eye swept the luxury around him. "I've brought back the bundle of letters that was in your basket. They ain't no good to me. How much will you give for 'em?"

## THE WEB DESTROYED

“I do not want them,” Laura said. “But I will give you one minute to go away, or I will send for the servants.”

“What do you want to lie to me for?” Heintz asked. “You’ve only got one servant, and I’ve took pains to send her away with a letter.”

The full force of the situation staggered Laura, yet she kept up the appearance of courage.

“I shall give you nothing,” said she, still facing Heintz bravely. “But I shall rouse the house if you do not go away at once.”

“Nick,” Heintz said to his confederate, “shut the door and send up the gentleman. Tell him he kin try his turn.” Then he turned to Laura and said, with an eager quickening of his speech, “By —, miss, don’t lose no time. The gentleman what’s coming is going to do you harm. I want to get out of it. Give me a few dollars, miss, and I’ll clear out. He can’t carry you away without me. He was going to use chloryform if you showed fight, but I’ve got the bottle in my pocket. It’s true; don’t think I’m kidding. I ain’t stuck on this job like I was. Something queer’s come over me since I come here. Hand over a few dollars, will you, and I’ll skin out—and my pal too. The gent can’t do nothing without us.”

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

Laura looked him up and down with contempt. Whatever there was in the atmosphere, surcharging it with some mighty influence, was causing the ruffian before her to meditate precipitate flight. At the same time it was tautening her nerves until they felt ready to snap.

Three Etherians—Editha, Mrs. Isabel, and Deborah—were in the room. The excitement under which they labored, and the gravity of the situation which so disturbed them, made itself felt, even by the wretched tramp with whom they could have no intercourse.

As Lamont came with strong, firm tread along the hall and opened the door, the spirits of Mrs. Lamont and Editha confronted that of Deborah with such a concentration of their indignant displeasure that the courage of the mischievous Etherian was daunted.

“Deborah”—it was Mrs. Isabel who began the communication—“your son is at the door. Disarm his mind of its present shameful purpose; turn him back impotently; withdraw your wicked influence over him at once, or—”

“Or what, Isabel? You do not dare to utter the threat which I read in your mind as clearly as if you had spoken it. You will not bring public dishonor on your own earthly kin.”

## THE WEB DESTROYED

Lamont entered the room boldly, but on the next instant exhibited embarrassment, as he bowed awkwardly to Laura. He was about to advance, and apparently to offer his hand, when a shiver coursed down his body, and he paused, and became irresolute and confused.

“ You have read but a part of my will, Deborah,” Mrs. Lamont went on. “ Promise what I demand, this instant, that you will dissuade your son, and that you will take your presence from among these mortals, or I will call out that Name the mere utterance of which will instantly bring upon you the penalty of your sin.”

“ Oh, Isabel, you would not do that? Not that! Not that, I implore you!” Deborah cried, with impassioned thought-utterance, as she advanced towards her accusers. “ I imagined I read in you a purpose to pursue my son with earthly misfortune. In my concern for him I was ready to defy you; but, as you may want mercy, I beg you not to have me judged.”

“ Do not delay. We are both determined, Deborah,” Mrs. Lamont replied. “ Refuse what we command, and, truly, your son shall be known among men as a felon. We will influence Laura Balm and her advisers to accuse him before the law of earth; but, this instant, we command you

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

to promise to send your son out of this room without new sin upon his conscience, and to warn him from this girl's presence forever on this earth. Swear, too, that you will cease your mischief among men, or I will now speak that August Name to pronounce which will be to degrade you for ages if our cause be just."

"No, no! I promise all that you command. But, before I go," Deborah continued, "I pray you to believe that at no time, in even the slightest degree, have I given my son other counsel than to marry Laura Balm in order that he might obtain control of his uncle's estate. You must know I speak the truth. He would have outstepped my urging—he had even planned her ruin in Powellton, but I controlled him against his inclination. This I will swear."

"It is true," replied Mrs. Lamont; "still, you have wickedly misused your powers. All your influence has been towards encouraging his selfishness—one of the ugliest of sins which it is our part to do our utmost to correct. And what now, if you have your way, and he were to carry her to his apartments? How certain are you of your influence in that case? What of her good name? Deborah, you have abused the powers given to us for the advantage of our kin on earth. You have

## THE WEB DESTROYED

pursued this young woman with heartless unconcern for her peace and innocence. You have tortured her feelings, frightened her, thwarted the course of justice. You cannot deny it. Take your son away, and remove your evil influence from earth at once, for we are both in earnest."

Deborah turned and faced her son, transporting herself as quickly as thought moves to a position before him. On the instant she assumed a form which was visible only to him. It stood between Laura and himself, revealing his mother, terror-stricken, and, at the same time, in an attitude of warning. One of her hands was upraised, and in her face he read an extremity of alarm. Lamont shrank from the spectre with a stifled exclamation.

"Do you see anything before you, Miss Balm?" he cried, adding: "No; it has gone. I could have sworn— But I must be ill, I think. I feel so strangely."

"Your own thoughts have frightened you, Mr. Lamont," Laura said, with unsteady voice, for the influence of the Etherians had not yet abated. "You came to persecute me, but I am no longer afraid. You will not carry out your plans."

"Will you be reasonable to-day?" he asked. "I do not want to alarm you. I cannot under-

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

stand what has come over me. It is too ridiculous—but I feel ill, Miss Balm."

His appearance confirmed the truth of what he said, for his face was pallid and his lips were bloodless.

"I came to ask you once again to do me the honor to be my wife. If I have been rude and frightened you, it is because of your groundless prejudice, and because you will not see how intense is my feeling for you."

"Mr. Lamont"—she spoke more calmly than before—"you came to use violence, but I am not afraid of you. I am a different woman; I feel many years older than when I came here with you only two days ago; older, and, I am sorry to say, much wiser. Your object then—as it is now that you have hired these ignorant men to carry me off—was to secure the fortune that has come to me. How can you be so wicked? You my cousin, too?"

"Your fortune? You know, then, that you are the heir?" Jack exclaimed, in astonishment. "You have seen the advertisements—or has Archibald Paton told you? I was told he did not know your name."

"I have seen my lawyers and those of our uncle," Laura replied. "Mr. Paton knows noth-



“ ‘ SURE, YE FAINTED, MA’AM,’ SAID IRISH ANNIE ”



## THE WEB DESTROYED

ing ; but many friends and protectors have sprung up around me. I am no longer the ignorant, helpless girl you expected to find me. But that is nothing beside the thought that we are connected by blood, and I had a right to rely upon your relationship as a guarantee of your friendship and help. I am sorry, Mr. Lamont ; for when you leave me, as I am sure you will do at once, we never can meet again.”

“ Hear me, please ! Let me plead for myself.”

“ I am sure it is best for you to go,” she said.

At that moment the door flew wide open, and came to a standstill with violence against the body of Bill Heintz. Christmas had flung it wide, and was now entering the room followed by two policemen, one of whom held Heintz’s companion by the collar.

“ This is the other one,” said Christmas, pointing to Heintz. “ You thought I should keep my talk for old women, didn’t you ? But you see what I was telling you in the country has come true. How d’ do, miss ? Was old Christmas right about the fairies, too ? Was he right about the web he used to talk about, when you smiled as you listened ? Oh, don’t be ashamed ; I don’t blame you. You was always kind to Christmas. Did he lie to you about those bad hands !” (He pointed at

## AN ANGEL IN A WEB

Jack Lamont.) "Old Christmas comes with good news this time, miss. The web is broken. Them bad hands is off you, miss. You have passed the last of them trouble-places I seen when I was looking yon and yon into your muddled life."

"What's up, I'd like to know?" Heintz said, when the heavy hand of a policeman fell upon his shoulder.

"Charged with attempting to obtain money from Brown and Crossley, 280 Broadway, in the name of one Laura Balm, by the use of stolen letters addressed to that person." Thus spoke the Law.

"It's a lie!" said Heintz.

"Well, prove it's a lie, that's all you've got to do," said Christmas, as the policemen dragged their prisoners along the hall.

"Why, where am I?" Laura asked, as she felt the shock of cold water upon her face, and, opening her eyes, saw only indescribable confusion in a room that swam and swung around her.

"Sure, ye fainted, ma'am," said Irish Annie. "And this ould man, who says he's a fri'nd of yours, was carrying you to this sofy when I come back. Are ye betther now?"

"Yes, thank you. I did not know I fainted.

## THE WEB DESTROYED

Thank you very much, Christmas—and Annie. I am all right again.” An irresistible impulse to obtain pen and paper came upon her, and she made her way a trifle feebly to the desk. Hardly had she seated herself before it when the pen all but leaped from her fingers. She controlled it, and then saw these words spin out behind it:

“*Good-bye, Laura. In pain and sorrow, call on Editha.*”

**THE END**







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